

5 DESIGN PRINCIPLES for climate-ready school grounds



Children at the Centre

Placing children at the center of green school ground design means recognizing them as creative contributors with valuable insights.

Their ideas help shape spaces that are engaging, developmentally appropriate, and reflective of how they actually use and experience the outdoors. Designing at a child's scale encourages exploration, independence, and confidence. This collaborative process invites adults to listen openly and share decision-making, fostering respect and empowerment. When children help shape their environment, they develop a strong sense of ownership and care—laying the foundation for long-term stewardship.



Healthy Natural Systems

Create living landscapes that support health, wellbeing, and connection—where both people and nature can thrive.

Green school grounds should reflect the dynamic relationships between soil, water, plants, animals, and people, and be designed to support biodiversity, climate resilience, and long-term sustainability. Recognizing that both ecosystems and communities are always changing, these spaces should be flexible and evolving—nurturing a lasting, responsive relationship between people and place.



Integrated Landscape and Program Design

Plan the outdoor space and educational activities together—so the physical environment and learning experiences support and enhance each other.

In green school grounds, this approach ensures that gardens, natural habitats, play areas, and outdoor classrooms aren't just separate features but work as a whole system. For example: Planting native gardens can become a hands-on science lab where students observe pollinators and study ecosystems.

By linking landscape design with curriculum and programming, schools create rich, living classrooms that connect students deeply to nature, foster stewardship, and enhance well-being.



Co-creation

Co-creation means developing ideas together with children and inviting the wider community to actively participate in shaping the project.

This is a collaborative process where everyone's voice and contribution are valued—whether it's time, skills, materials, or funding. By working respectfully and openly, partnerships grow stronger, creating a shared sense of ownership and pride in the school grounds.

When children, families, staff, and community members come together, the project reflects their diverse perspectives and strengths, making the space more meaningful and sustainable for everyone.



A Place for Everyone

A place for everyone means creating school grounds that welcome all living beings—people, plants, animals, and insects alike—are accessible and foster a true sense of belonging.

Design your space to be inclusive and accessible, addressing barriers that might prevent anyone from participating fully. Consider diverse sizes, physical and cognitive abilities, and communication styles when planning pathways, play areas, seating, and learning zones.

By integrating nature and removing barriers, your green space becomes a vibrant, nurturing environment where everyone—human and non-human—can thrive together.