A Crack in the Pavement

In an effort to help Canada's schools create natural school grounds, the NFB has teamed up with Evergreen, a national charity that advocates school ground naturalization projects. This compilation was specially produced by the NFB and donated to you by Evergreen. For information on Evergreen, visit www.evergreen.ca.

A Crack in the Pavement is a pair of videos showing that school grounds need not be barren expanses of asphalt and turf grass. What if there was a whole lot less pavement? What if the space was given over to gardens? Shot at schools across Canada, and using animation to complement live-action footage, these films are an inspiring look at — in the words of one student — how kids can stop looking at school the way it is and start thinking about the way it could be.

Growing Dreams gives an inspirational overview of school ground greening. It shows what kids have done to transform bare pavement into dream school grounds: growing trees for shade, flowers for butterflies, and vegetables for a food bank; building a rooftop garden, a courtyard greenhouse and restoring a pond as an outdoor classroom and a refuge for wildlife. 19 minutes

Digging In Students at Toronto's Jesse Ketchum Public School are fed up with their fenced-in, asphalt yard. So, with help from teachers, staff and parents — and advice from students who have participated in amazing gardening projects of their own — they start designing gardens to surround the school. 19 minutes

Directors: Jane Churchill, Gwynne Basen
Producer: Michael Fukushima

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada with the financial participation of Evergreen.

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Closed captioned. A decoder is required.

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A Crack in the Pavement
Compilation

Students can spend up to 25% of their school day on barren expanses of asphalt and turf: dangerous, lifeless school grounds that offer no interest or shelter and encourage aggression. Restoring nature to a school ground offers beauty in a safer and less hostile outdoor environment, with the added benefits of shade, improved air quality, softer play surfaces, quieter places to relax, increased wildlife habitat and opportunities for contact with the natural world.

Greening a school ground creates a more colourful, interesting and creative place to play and learn, brings lessons to life, offers endless opportunities for hands-on learning across the entire curriculum and benefits the whole community.

Suggested discussion topics and activities

Brainstorm ideas on how to improve the school’s outdoor space. Think of what could be done to improve habitats for the plants and animals that you would like to attract to your schoolyard.

Invite someone from an environmental group, a plant nursery or urban planning office to speak about greening projects.

Draw pictures of some of your favourite outdoor places.

List things that make an outdoor area interesting and special.

Go on a multi-sensory scavenger hunt. Find your favourite and least favourite smells, sights, sounds and textures.

Take a walking tour of the neighbourhood around the school. Make note of types of buildings, green spaces and vacant lots. Are the green spaces linked to make corridors for wildlife?

How does the amount and quality of green spaces make you feel?

Use your discoveries as a starting point to write a poem, essay or report or to paint a mural about your “dream” schoolyard.

Suggested resources

Evergreen  www.evergreen.ca
Green Brick Road  www.gbr.org
City Farmer  www.cityfarmer.org
I Can Garden  www.ICanGarden.com
Green Teacher  www.greenteacher.com
Canadian Wildlife Federation  www.cwf-fcf.org
Tree Canada Foundation  www.treecanada.ca
National Gardening Assn. (USA)  www.kidsgardening.com
SEEDS - Environmental Green Schools Program  www.greenschools.ca/seeds
Seeds of Change Garden (USA)  www.mnh.si.edu/garden

Growing Dreams

Some ideas for projects or things to do

Plant trees for shelter, plants for butterflies or bulbs for peace.
Grow a pizza garden, an alphabet garden or a fragrance garden.
Build bird feeders, compost boxes, benches or a weather station.
Grow seedlings in planters, window boxes or indoors under lights.
Hold a contest to name your project or design a fundraising t-shirt.
Find a local artist to help you design and paint a mural.
Paint outlines for games or a map on the pavement.
Grow berries for birds, carrots for muffins or seeds for the future.
Harvest a row of vegetables for the food bank.
Partner with older students or neighbours to build a shed.
Make a scarecrow, stepping stones or signs for the garden.

Digging In

Steps to a successful project

Step 1 - Get started
Form a Green Team. Hold a workshop or assembly. Visit a mentor school.

Step 2 - Get ideas
Discuss what you’d like to change and research the approvals you’ll need.

Step 3 - Get help
Ask teachers, parents, school staff, neighbours, local businesses for help.

Step 4 - Think ahead
Discuss goals. Plan for things you want to have and do in your playground.

Step 5 - Start with what you’ve got
Make a site map. List what’s there, how it’s used, good and bad features.

Step 6 - Make a design
Put all your ideas together. Ask a landscape architect to help with plans.

Step 7 - Gather resources
Think of ways to raise money. Ask for donations of time, tools or plants.

Step 8 - Think big but start small
Dream up big ideas, but plan to do the work over time in small stages.

Step 9 - Dig in and get growing
Organize work parties. Plan a big celebration and invite the media!

Step 10 - Keep track and keep going
Take before-and-after pictures. Invite another school to visit your project!

To all those who participated
Congratulations to all the students, parents, teachers, staff, friends and neighbours at the many wonderful greening projects at the schools we visited across Canada. Thank you for your generous support and contribution to the A Crack in the Pavement video project.