

Whip Up a Wetland

Wetlands include, among other waterlogged wonders, swamps, fens, marshes, muskeg, peat bogs, and potholes. Countless species, from mallards to mud puppies, mate, lay eggs, hatch, swim, hunt, and grow in these habitats.

Wetlands act as filters by breaking down sewage and harmful contaminants, leaving clean soil and water behind. Common cattails and bulrushes absorb toxic metals such as mercury and lead. Wetlands also soak up rain and snow like sponges and help to prevent erosion and flooding.

Creating a mini wetland in your backyard or schoolyard is fairly simple, and worth doing as it can attract a host of wet and wild creatures.

1. Scout out a location. Look for a low-lying soggy spot that never entirely dries up. Once you identify a potential spot consult with parents and/or school maintenance staff.
2. If there are no naturally wet areas in your schoolyard, you can create your own:
 - If you can, pick a spot in partial shade.
 - Use a length of twine or garden hose to outline the shape of the wetland you want. Even a small wetland will add surprising wildlife diversity, so base the size of your wetland on the amount of space available and the energy of your volunteer diggers.
 - Remove any sod and dig a hole that's 30 to 90 cm deep.
 - Line the hollow with a sturdy plastic sheet. If your area gets a lot of rain, puncture the liner in several places to allow slow drainage. If your site is naturally soggy, you needn't put down plastic at all.
 - Layer 5 cm of pebbles on top of the liner, then 5 cm of damp peat moss and some roughly chopped sod. Make sure the peat moss feels damp when you open the bag. It won't work if it's crumbly and dry.
3. Now it's time to add plants:
 - Always use native wetland species. Don't collect plants from the wild unless an area is slated for development. If you purchase plants, be sure to buy from a reputable nursery.
 - Wildflowers that thrive along the edges of moist areas include marsh marigold, cardinal flower, blue flag, pickerel weed, and bottle and closed gentian. You can also plant a moisture-loving shrub or two, such as red-osier dogwood or buttonbush, along the edges of your little wetland.

For additional resources visit:

CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education