



Greening Our Schools:

“A year from now you may wish you had started today”
—Karen Lamb

On beyond the planting of a tree:

1. **Plant a tree; it IS a valuable project on many levels.** Identify someone in the community who can provide a tree and planting instructions. Research selections and debate selections based upon native vs. non-native, energy-saving features as well as water requirements.
<http://www.greeningschools.org/docs/plantatree.pdf>
2. **Recycle.** Begin a classroom recycle program. Find out what recycle options are available in the community. If they are very limited (aluminum only), research the reasons why other options do not exist. Is it possible to encourage the community to provide another service for recycling? A game and links to a broad variety of resources can add enrichment to your recycle activities.
<http://www.greeningschools.org/docs/RecycleJeopardy.pdf>
3. **Reduce.** Restrict the amount of waste through composting, purchasing fewer items, reusing before tossing, and sharing with others. Find other ways in which the class can reduce the amount of waste going into landfills. <http://illinois.earth911.org/usa/master.asp?s=ls&a=Recycle&cat=1&serviceid>
4. **Rebuy and buy green.** Buy used before buying new. Can you save a computer from going into the landfill by reusing someone else’s computer? Buy a book used instead of new. This will save money as well as reduce the stream of waste going into landfills. <http://www.greenhome.com/earthday/>
5. **Compost.** Landfills are filled with yard waste that doesn’t decompose fast. Grass alone makes up about 30% to 40% of all waste in some communities. Can you reduce yard waste by implementing a composting program at school? Learn how to make a compost pile.
<http://www.compostingcouncil.org/index.cfm>
6. **Second-chance week.** Have a trade and share day. Bring in electronics, toys, books, and other items that are no longer used, but still functional. We all loose interest in certain toys and books. Make these available for trading and giving away.
7. **Litter pick-ups.** Have students adopt either a portion of the school yard for litter pick up, or select a day of the week for litter pick up. Sift through the items found and separate out the recyclable items. Weigh the trash that is not recyclable and maintain a running tally of the weight. Does the volume decrease over the year?
8. **Creative trash.** Reduce the volume of waste going into the trash. Make musical instruments from trash (examples include castanets from bottle caps, maracas from rice-filled plastic jars, and drums from balloon covered cans).
9. **Art from trash.** Have an art contest at the school where the students create art sculptures and multi-media wall hangings that use recycled artifacts from clean trash. Find ways in which to match solid waste with an art activity. <http://www.kid-at-art.com/htdoc/matchtmp.html>

10. **Invention creations.** Encourage students to disassemble old record players, clocks, phones, and other small electrical appliances and have the students save the pieces and parts. Save these pieces and parts for future inventions and for math manipulatives.
11. **Holiday waste reduction.** Design a school-wide campaign to educate everyone about excessive waste generated around the holidays. Promote ways to reduce gift wrap and packaging waste as well as food waste. Create an Integrated Waste Management committee for generating lists that can go home after Thanksgiving. <http://www.greeningschools.org/docs/greenhalloween1.pdf> and <http://www.greeningschools.org/docs/greenchristmas2.pdf>
12. **Garbage relays.** Learn the recycle symbols and check for understanding of items that can be recycled, reused, composted. (What do those symbols and numbers mean? www.psrc.usm.edu/macrog/work/recycle.htm) Mix these items in bins on the opposite side of a room or field and conduct relays. Students can individually pick up items from a bin and then return them to a second bin marked recycle, reuse, compost, or “can’t do anything with it—off to the landfill”. www.stanslaughter.com/kstour/rlgpdf/
13. **“My School Recycles” Festival.** Hold a recycle festival at the school with poster contests, art shows and contests, student presentations, and skits, games, and waste audits. Design “My School Recycles school name” bumper stickers to use for raising funds that support school recycling projects.
14. **Native landscaping.** Native landscaping attracts butterflies and birds to the schoolyard, and it requires less water and maintenance and significantly reduces needs for fertilizers and pesticides. Minnesota has produced some valuable material and activities for elementary grades. <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/ipm/ipmpubs.html> and www.mda.state.mn.us/ipm/pestpatrol/fightingpestswith3ps.pdf
15. **Local experts.** Invite someone to the class to speak about waste management, recycling, composting, native landscaping, or earth day initiatives. Write newspaper articles on the presentation. Contact www.greeningschools.org and we will help you locate an expert.
16. **Conduct a life-cycle analysis of some common product that the students use.** Research the production process of a CD, its packaging, and all of the steps from concept to purchase (CDs, tennis shoes, notebooks, pre-packaged lunches, or any other everyday item can be researched). Assess the waste along the route and recommend ways to reduce the waste.
17. **Book worms.** Locate books on recycling and native landscaping and help the librarian establish a special display for a designated week.
18. **Paper the town.** Have a recycle poster contest and invite the media to judge the contest. Ask local stores and libraries to place winning posters in their stores. Generate a one-page fact sheet on your community’s recycling opportunities and place these with posters.
19. **Jug biology.** Make aquariums, terrariums, and observation boxes from plastic bottles, jugs, butter, and yogurt tubs. www.bottlebiology.org/intro/index.html
20. **Practice.** It takes effort to change old habits. If you start now, you won’t have to wish you had started in a year or two. Manage your waste now before your waste manages you later.

The Earth Day resolution: Web links, lessons, and educational resources will soon accompany each of the preceding topics.

For more information call 217-244-5637, Illinois Waste Management and Research Center.