



Learning Meadows



Learning Meadows Fun

Just because it is winter and the plants are asleep, doesn't mean that you can't still have some fun outside in the Learning Meadows. These activities are written for classes, but they would also be fun for families or other groups, like Brownies or Cubs.

Animals in Winter – Discuss how animals cope with the cold weather. Make a visit to the schoolyard in the winter when it snows to discover which animals are active during the winter. Discuss how animals who are active usually pack on the fat to be able to make it through the winter. If you have them use samples of animal furs or pictures of animals in winter settings to enhance your discussion.

Snow as an insulator – Fill numbered film canisters with warm liquid Jell-O. Have students take and record the temperature of the Jell-O water and secure the covers before going outside. When outside, have students place the covered film canisters in light spots and shaded spots above and under the snow. Have them record the positions of the canisters on a map so they can find them later. Give the canisters at least 1/2 hour of time without being disturbed. Then recover and note the changes in the Jell-O.

Winter weeds – Have students learn about what plants do to survive the winter. What do plants that they learned in the spring or fall look like in the winter? What plants hold their seeds during the winter? What color stems do some plants have in the winter? Have them mark a winter weed they don't recognize and watch it during the spring growing time to see if they can identify the plant after it comes out of its winter hibernation.

Snowflake Capture – During a snowstorm, give the students sheets of black paper. Have them capture a snowflake on the paper. Spray the snowflake with a pump hairspray product or photo fixative. Then have students look at the snowflake under a microscope or hand lens. Are they all different? **Winter twigs** – Have students learn winter tree identification by looking at different features of deciduous twigs. They can also use bark to help identify winter trees.

Project Summary

The Schoolyard Naturalization Committee (now the Learning Meadows Committee) initially set out to create an outdoor classroom based on the principles of Integrated Pest Management. The area in the front of Escuela Canyon Meadows School (ECMS) was turned from a plain, grassed area to a dynamic learning space using native plants, rocks and soil. The Learning Meadows has been designed to demonstrate the principles of low maintenance and environmentally sound gardening to ECMS students and the broader community.

The first meeting of the Schoolyard Naturalization Committee was held in September 2001. The planning and design phase took 2 years and included everything from researching funding options to surveying the teachers to identify curricular links and desirable project attributes. The initial plan was created by JM Borrow Design and was reviewed by a master gardener from the Calgary Zoo. During this time there were two "plant rescues" that took place – native grasses from the site of the new Alberta Children's Hospital and native shrubs that were about to be bulldozed when construction of the new 37th Street bridge began. There was also a logo competition held at the school, with over 100 entries. The winning design came from a grade 4 student.

Phase 1 planting occurred on September 22nd, 2003 and was undertaken as a school project. Prior to planting day, the site was prepared using a Rotadairon (a kind of very big rototiller) to retain the original topsoil. Holes were dug for each plant and plants were placed at the site they were to be planted in. On planting day, classes came out 2 at a time. As one class was planting, another



class was being instructed on how to plant. Classes were divided into groups of 2 to 4 students, depending on the size of the plant, and each student worked on adding soil improver to the planting site, preparing the root ball of the plant and filling the hole with the premixed backfill.



Having the entire school involved was great. The students loved it! By having students involved directly in the planting, they have taken ownership of the

project. Most students can still identify which plant they planted. A great student even told her teacher that it was the best day of her life.



Phase 2 planting in September 2004 was undertaken in a similar fashion by a smaller group of volunteers, including parents, community members, teachers and students. Learning Meadows is an on-going project. To date over 200

native shrubs and trees have been planted using enriched soil. Large rocks and log benches have been placed to allow the students to sit and use the area as a classroom and other features such as "dry river beds" and bridges have been installed to add interest and reduce flooding for the area. It is expected that the stone amphitheatre included in the original plan will be in place by the fall of 2005. Other projects, such as an Inukshuk, a sundial, a weather station and several bird and bat houses are also currently being discussed.



September 10, 2003



November 22, 2004

The Learning Meadows Committee would like to thank all the sponsors and volunteers and students that made this project a reality.

Picture Summary



Canyon Meadows School before Naturalization.



Preparing the ground.



Moving dirt.



It's planting day!



Hugging pots to get the plants out.



Students planting.



More students planting.



Putting mulch on top.



Look, son! Phase One is done!



Ready to start Phase Two.



A gravel pit...



...that needs to be moved.



Busy, busy planting day.



Now we need to water them!



Happy Planters!



Moving dirt. Almost done!



Top it off with a bit of mulch.



And Phase Two is done!



A little regrading work on Phase One.



Canyon Meadows School, November 2004.

learning | as unique | as every student