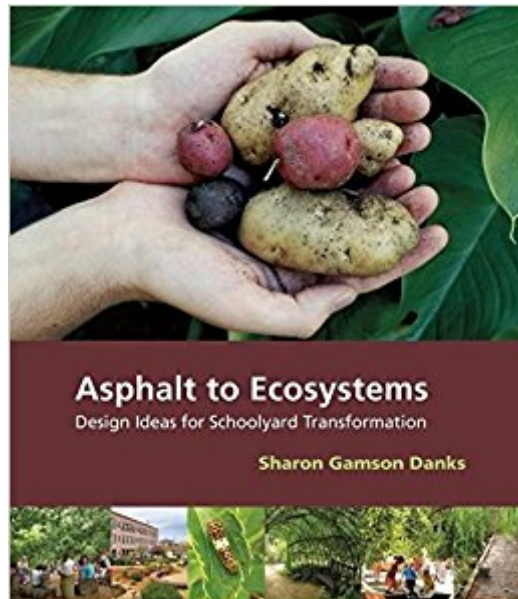




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# Asphalt To Ecosystems: Design Ideas For Schoolyard Transformation



## Synopsis

Asphalt to Ecosystems is a compelling color guidebook for designing and building natural schoolyard environments that enhance childhood learning and play experiences while providing connection with the natural world. Intended for parents, teachers, school administrators, designers, environmentalists, and community volunteers, this book is a fantastic resource that will inspire readers to transform their own school grounds. With this book, Danks broadens our notion of what a well-designed schoolyard should be, taking readers on a journey from traditional, ordinary grassy fields and asphalt, to explore the vibrant and growing movement to "green" school grounds in the United States and around the world. This book documents exciting green schoolyard examples from almost 150 schools in 11 countries, illustrating that a great many things are possible on school grounds when they are envisioned as outdoor classrooms for hands-on learning and play. The book's 500 vivid, color photographs showcase some of the world's most innovative green schoolyards including: edible gardens with fruit trees, vegetables, chickens, honey bees, and outdoor cooking facilities; wildlife habitats with prairie grasses and ponds, or forest and desert ecosystems; schoolyard watershed models, rainwater catchment systems and waste-water treatment wetlands; renewable energy systems that power landscape features, or the whole school; waste-as-a-resource projects that give new life to old materials in beautiful ways; K-12 curriculum connections for a wide range of disciplines from science and math to art and social studies; creative play opportunities that diversify school ground recreational options and encourage children to run, hop, skip, jump, balance, slide, and twirl, as well as explore the natural world first hand.

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: New Village Press (November 2, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0976605481

ISBN-13: 978-0976605485

Product Dimensions: 8.5 x 0.6 x 9.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #692,593 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #115 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Gardening & Landscape Design > By Technique > Urban #152 in Books > Arts & Photography > Photography & Video > Equipment, Techniques & Reference > Lighting #475

## Customer Reviews

Press Reviews "I have often seen children's sense of wonder awaken as they find life teeming in a handful of soil or nurture a seed into a healthy plant to be harvested and enjoyed in a delicious meal with their classmates. Sharon Danks's *Asphalt to Ecosystems* is a wonderful introduction to the design ideas that can transform a traditional schoolyard into a place where such vital learning can occur, under the wise and skillful guidance of the growing movement of educators dedicated to education for sustainable living." — Zenobia Barlow, Cofounder and Executive Director, The Center for Ecoliteracy "Asphalt to Ecosystems reflects the author's passion for the topic and presents more than a decade of innovative practice interwoven with extensive international field investigation. The carefully crafted text, profusely illustrated with closely observed examples, convincingly demonstrates how ecologically rich environments can serve the triumvirate of children's play, learning, and education—and the good health of both children and planet. This inspiring book brings together and builds on the work of long time pioneers who share author Sharon Danks's vision. Those pursuing the same mission are offered an exceptionally valuable tool and a new benchmark of design for educating a new eco-literate generation." — Robin Moore, MCP, Director, The Natural Learning Initiative, North Carolina State University. Co-author, *Natural Learning: The Life History of an Environmental Schoolyard* "Danks's book exemplifies planning's comprehensive approach to design and community engagement. She demonstrates that sustainability goes well beyond green technologies—encompassing the patterns of place and envisioning schools and schoolyards as centers of community." — Jeffrey L. Soule, FAICP, Director of Outreach and International Programs, American Planning Association "This is a beautiful book, loaded with compassion for children and deep understanding of the learning process. It is not just a primer on ecological landscaping in the curriculum, but a blueprint for a greener and smarter curriculum." — David W. Orr, Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics, Oberlin College, author, *Ecological Literacy and Hope Is an Imperative* "A groundbreaking and informative book with examples from around the world that will inspire others to create green engaging environments for their children. To educate the next generation of earth stewards we need to immerse them in settings where an ecological viewpoint becomes second nature. Sharon Danks shows us the way." — Clare Cooper Marcus, Professor Emerita, Departments of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of California, Berkeley. Co-author, *Healing Gardens* "Danks encourages teachers to take their students on field trips to their own schoolyards." — Amanda

Marrazzo, Chicago Tribune "It's a delightful book; meticulously researched, beautifully illustrated with full-colour photographs, combining persuasive arguments for change with a clear, accessible, writing style. We would recommend this book to any school – primary and secondary or PTA with an interest in taking learning outdoors, becoming a 'greener' or providing richer play experiences. It's also an invaluable text for designers and planners, offering guidance on materials, planting and sustainability, based on real-life, successful examples in a wide range of different school contexts."

•Julie Mountain, Operations Director of Learning Through Landscapes "Wow! I wish this book had been around years ago when I first got involved with my local school's outdoor classroom. It gives guidelines for building everything from wildlife sanctuaries and edible gardens to sustainable energy and water systems, and offers ideas for encouraging creative play and connecting curriculum. Great photos illustrate how children interact with the natural world, art and academics in the outdoor classroom. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to transform -- or continue transforming -- their schoolyard, park or outdoor community space. It will cause you to look at your children's or student's play space with brand new eyes... and that's a very good thing. Every school administrator and park official should have a copy of this inspiring manual on her desk."

•Anna Nagro, Founder of GardenABCs "Parents, teachers, school administrators, and community planners will all find this book both helpful and revealing; children will find the results magical."

•Marlene Y. Satter, Foreword Reviews "Asphalt to Ecosystems does a great job targeting its audience: teachers, students, and community activists. It is heavy on practical advice and detailed examples while being light on theory. Danks recognizes that some of the greatest challenges to such innovative playgrounds are liability legislation and a general fear of the unknown. Therefore, this book lays out a framework for change and supplements it with ample global examples. It is as much a call-to-action as an expose of works, and most definitely a wonderful addition to any elementary school library."

•Kevin J. Zhang, Re:place Magazine "As I was reading this book I realized I wanted to buy boxes of it and send copies off to all officials involved in education at the national and state level – it is that good."

•Deborah Dalton, Landscape Architecture Magazine "The book could have shown a great idea possible only in a perfect world, but beautiful photography, lists of resources, and a chapter on infrastructure combine to make the reader want to organize action teams and hold fundraisers. This book is an inspirational handbook for everyone: landscape architect, PTO representative, teacher, parent. I finished the book feeling like I had the answer for the phenomenon Richard Louv identified as Nature Deficit Disorder. It will inspire anyone with vision who also believes that our future relies on reconnecting our children to our planet and plugging them into the natural world around

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Sharon Gamson Danks is an environmental planner and founding partner of Bay Tree Design in Berkeley, California. As a researcher, writer, and hands-on designer and planner, she has visited and documented over 200 green schoolyard and park projects in North America, Europe, Great Britain, and Japan and has helped over three dozen schools transform their grounds into vibrant ecosystems for learning and play. An inspiring palette of school grounds possibilities for parents, teachers, students, designers, planners, and school administrators. Author Sharon Danks broadens our notion of what a well-designed schoolyard should be, taking readers on a journey from traditional, ordinary grassy fields and asphalt to explore what's being created in the growing movement toward "green" schoolgrounds in the United States and around the world. This book documents exciting examples from more than 150 schools in 11 countries, illustrating a vast range of possibilities in outdoor classrooms for learning and play. More than 500 vivid color photographs showcase some of the world's most innovative green schoolyards including: edible gardens with fruit trees, vegetables, chickens, honeybees, and outdoor cooking facilities; wildlife habitats with prairie grasses and ponds, or forest and desert ecosystems; schoolyard watershed models, rainwater catchment systems, and waste-water treatment models; renewable energy systems that power landscape features or the whole school; waste-as-a-resource projects that give new life to old materials in beautiful ways; K-12 curriculum connections for a wide range of disciplines from science and math to art and social studies; creative play opportunities that diversify school ground recreational options and encourage children to explore the natural world firsthand. The book grounds these examples in a practical framework that illustrates simple landscape design choices all schools can use to make their schoolyards more comfortable, enjoyable, and sustainable. And it describes a participatory design process that schools can use to engage their communities in transforming asphalt to ecosystems.

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I am a landscape architect and have been involved in transforming many asphalt schoolyards into green, sustainable, diverse community playgrounds in NYC for years. I bought this book because of my interest in environmental education in schoolyards and because it was highly recommended by a friend (and reviewed in Landscape Architecture Magazine). As I read it, I was so inspired by the ideas, elements of different types of ecological schoolyards and how to implement environmental education for schools. Even though I have implemented many similar or the same ideas found in this book, I still found it interesting and thought-provoking. This book is really packed with resources as well for further reading and internet investigation and are also tied to the Asphalt 2 Ecosystems website:[....]I highly recommend this book for all landscape architects, urban planners/designers, teachers, environmental educators, students, school PTA members, community group leaders and anyone interested or involved in children's outdoor environments. It is more than worth the modest price on .com!

Practical, well researched and well cited guide for campus greening and the creation of outdoor play spaces as well as outdoor classrooms Asphalt and Ecosystems offers beautiful and inspiring examples of school campus transformations that suit all regions, sizes and school needs. (I especially admired Danks inclusion of European outdoor spaces.) In this book you will find

inspiration and examples of innovative and transformative spaces as well as how schools and community have designed outdoor spaces for specific needs and curriculum. There is a wonderful resource section and index as well.

If you want to bring the advantages of children being out of doors to learn to your child's school, this is the best book to read. It will give you the tools, and information needed to bring Environmental Stewardship to any city, town or state. Our children need to be outdoors learning how to care for their surroundings. I am so impressed with Ms. Sharon Gamson Danks, I wished I could work for her.

Great job documenting a good number of effective looking playgrounds. This is a nice book for the lay person who wishes that their school site was more than turf and asphalt. There are many photos, a strong thesis, and some implementation ideas. I can see the influence of *The Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv, *The Inclusive City* by the firm M.I.G. and, of course Clare Cooper Marcus' many years of work studying healing gardens. My only argument with this book is that after teaching for 35 years and also having earned a certificate in landscape architecture from the author's university, I would have liked to see more curriculum tie-ins to entice teachers to use the space on a regular basis. If a space is not well-used, it is more difficult to get people to take care of it (as volunteers), teachers are swamped with demands on their time, and we all know that schools can't afford enough garden and playground stewards. Furthermore, in the state of California (and perhaps in other states as well) science is not tested till 5th grade and social studies is not tested in the elementary school. So teachers are even less inclined to use spaces where the curricular connections deal primarily with those two subjects. It is sad, but true. Using the many resources in the appendix, one is compelled to explore further and will perhaps find more strategies that will help their particular schools overcome the barriers and make great sites for children. And as the general public becomes more aware of the need for nature and choice out on our playgrounds, perhaps individual schools will take this book to heart and help create a groundswell of change.

I bought this some months ago because I'm planning our school's new music garden. I've looked through lots of other books like this one, but this book had tons more great photos. It really got me inspired and excited.

This was so well written with thoughtful insight and worthy experiences.

Simply wonderful. Highly highly recommend this book. Used it at school and while redesigning my yard to make it more 'kid friendly'!

I'm starting a school garden and this book was a really helpful resource. Nicely organized and thought out. I know I will refer to it often.

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