



# Seating

Well-designed seating provides a number of benefits:

- a place for gathering and social activity;
- a place to eat, read, do school work or play board games;
- an area to wait for a ride home or meet friends;
- increased aesthetic appeal and access to designed areas;
- a space to break-up different use areas;
- a vantage point over a play area; and
- a place to stop, rest and reflect.



## Design details

### Tips for Incorporating Seating on Your School Grounds

- Consider whether you require shelter for various seating areas to provide protection from wind, sun and rain and an opportunity for outdoor classes.
- Make sure the seating you provide on your school grounds is accessible by everyone. This may involve providing a pathway to seating areas.
- Think about the material used for seating. Durability is important, as well as creativity. Some schools have invited a local artist or craftsman to work with students to design creative seating. Also consider reused or unwanted materials in the creation of seating. These materials provide creative, as well as cost-effective seating options.
- Allow for seating in a variety of sizes, shapes and arrangements based on project goals and the different ages of children at your school. Remember to provide seating that fits children. A typical bench is 45 centimetres (18 inches) high for an adult, so a young child's bench will be much smaller than that. To be sure, measure different students from their heel to the back of their knee to determine the height of the seats. Measuring students from the back of the knee to the bottom of the spine will help to calculate the depth for seating.
- Think about the various uses and needs for seating on your school ground to help you decide on the type of seating you may require. A variety of seating types and arrangements may be needed to accommodate all of your users. Although this may seem an arduous task, remember seating that fulfills the needs of its users is more likely to be appreciated and used correctly. Involve the whole school to see what seating is currently used and what students and staff feel are needed.
- Consider opportunities for incorporating seating with existing or new built features such as container gardens, steps, fences or walls. Using these areas can add versatility to your school grounds as well as provide cost effective seating.
- Consider adaptability of the seating provided. Many times children like to create their own seats out of logs, rocks or other loose parts.
- Survey your site once you have an idea of the types of seating needed to match seating requirements with seating location. A variety of seating in different locations is just as important as the types of seating provided. Consider opportunities to overlook play areas and seating that provides protection and recluse from play areas for quiet study and reflection.

# Types of Seating

# 1

## Table Wheels

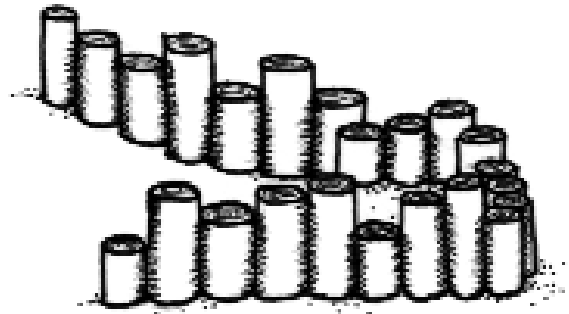
Edmison Heights Elementary School in Peterborough, Ontario has provided table wheels made out of cable spools for their students where they can sit and do school work, gather with friends or complete activities from their natural study area. The table wheels perform the same function as a picnic table and bench with the added benefit that they are child-size.



# 2

## Log Seating

Log seating is easy to provide at schools, especially if your local municipality can provide you with logs from fallen trees in the area. Logs can be used in a number of ways to provide a variety of seating styles:



Hollywood Public School

- Lay logs along the ground and use as horizontal seats under a tree or in a garden.
- Cut logs into a number of sizes and use as tree stump seats placed throughout a garden.
- Place logs in the ground so children can sit on the upright end. This technique can also be used to edge a garden area and provide seating at the same time
- Place a log or piece of wood across two log pieces to create a bench.



# 3

## Container Garden Bench

Build a seat on the side of your container garden. In this particular example, a local artist worked with students at a school in England to design and build seating along their container gardens. The container wall was built like a step and a wood seat and backrest were added. The artists provided a playful design for the seats to set them apart from the container garden.



Courtesy of Learning through Landscapes

# 4

## Story Tellers Chair

The “Story Tellers Magic Chair” was conceived by a local artist and a school in England to create a functional yet artistic element that becomes a centre focal point for the playground and transforms the school grounds into the outdoor classroom. It also transforms the reader into a magical role-playing character as they take their turn in the story tellers chair. The chair was made out of heavy pieces of wood for the seat and arms and has a curved wooden back and wood shingled roof to match the natural theme of the playground.



Courtesy of Learning through Landscapes



Broadacres Junior School

## Checker Board Log Seats

Broadacres Junior School in Etobicoke, Ontario created seating from large logs and carved an area out of the log for a checkerboard to fit inside. Students can sign out the checkerboards to use in these seating areas during recess and lunch.

# 5

# 6

## Tree Seat Ring

A tree seat ring can be constructed that circles the tree and gives children a shaded place to rest. This seating also helps to protect tree roots from compaction. One school in England constructed a tree seat ring in a pentagon shape around trees in their school yard, using metal leg supports that could be fastened to the asphalt and wood planks for seating. In more natural settings, logs and tree stumps can be used.



St. Martin de Porres Catholic School

## Materials

The types and combination of materials that can be used for seating are as endless as the variety of seating styles. However, keep in mind safety and durability of the materials you chose — make sure they meet the approval of your school’s safety standards. The following list includes a sample of materials used by other schools.

- 🍃 untreated lumber;
- 🍃 tree stumps;
- 🍃 recycled plastic;
- 🍃 metal (used as the legs for seating structures since metal seats get too hot);
- 🍃 rocks; and
- 🍃 logs.

# Codes and Safety Standards

- ✦ Do not use pressure-treated wood in the construction of seating, tables or other structures where hands are in frequent contact with the surfaces. Instead, select untreated lumber and apply a certified non-toxic protective finish.
- ✦ Construct seating to stand up to the weather and vandalism. When using lumber to construct benches or other types of seating, use two- to three-inch thick boards that have a minimum width of six-inches. Heavier timbers will reduce repair and maintenance in the long run and also have a greater aesthetic appeal.
- ✦ All hardware should be galvanized and joinery should be done with heavy nuts, bolts and screws rather than with nails.



## Where to *go* from here?

### Sources for this fact sheet

Learning through Landscapes. "Thinking About Seating in School Grounds." *E-scape*, Issue 13, February 1997.  
Available from Learning through Landscapes [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk).

Pennington, Gary. "Benches, Bridges and Other Beautiful Things." A section in Grant, Tim and Littlejohn, Gail (eds.),  
*Greening School Grounds: Creating Habitats for Learning*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001.  
Available from Green Teacher: (416) 960-1244, [www.greenteacher.com](http://www.greenteacher.com).

### Example projects

Altadore Elementary School, Calgary, Alberta: (403) 777-6910  
Broadacres Public School, Etobicoke, Ontario: (416) 394-7030  
Edmison Heights Elementary School, Peterborough, Ontario: (705) 745-0722  
Humber Valley Junior Middle School, Mississauga, Ontario: (416) 394-7860  
Ossington Old Orchard Public School, Toronto, Ontario: (416) 393-0710