



## GETTING STARTED: SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

### To minimize safety hazards in your naturalized area:

- Keep bushes trimmed or use short ones so they don't block sightlines.
- Include plenty of 'escape routes' so a child cannot become trapped within an area.
- Encourage high use of the area — an area that is well used offers security for children.
- Keep branches trimmed fairly high up the tree for easy supervision.
- Choose species with these factors in mind and keep your area well maintained.
- Practical design tips for safety can be found in Chapter 6 of *All Hands in the Dirt: A Guide to Designing and Creating Natural School Grounds* and in *Design Ideas for the Outdoor Classroom*.

### Before you go out:

- Wear sunscreen (of SPF 15 or greater, even when it's cloudy) and dress appropriately for the task.
- Think about how hot it is; productivity decreases in the heat. Reduce the time spent on work and have water readily available.
- Arrange work between recesses and lunches and remember to include time for clean-up.
- Do warm-up exercises before beginning heavy work such as digging and hauling.
- Be aware of allergies. Some students and teachers have allergies to things such as mould, peanuts and bees. Children with mould allergies may have difficulty with wood mulch. Make sure that parents are aware of gardening activities so they can request their children not participate in those that might cause an allergic reaction. Look out for signs of reactions (stuffy nose, watery eyes, dark circles around the eyes, swelling, etc.).
- Test for toxic chemicals in any soil where food will be grown.
- When planting bulbs, make sure these are out of the reach of small children, as some are poisonous.

### Tools:

- Keep a clear working area. Don't leave tools and material lying around. Watch for trip hazards. Hoses should be stored properly after use. Lay rakes and shovels with edges down.
- Students need to carry all tools by the handle with the pointed part down, not over the shoulder or dragging on the ground.
- When digging with shovels or hand spades, children's hands and feet must be clear of the space. No students should have their hands in the hole while others are digging.
- Teach students to press with the bottom of their foot on the shovel and not to jump on it. If they slip, they can cut the inside of their leg on the edge of the shovel.
- When students are digging, notice the wind direction and make sure that the dust from the dirt doesn't blow into their eyes.

- No more than three students should be digging in a hole for a tree at one time.
- Never work with lawn and garden equipment in damp or wet conditions.
- Use stakes taller than the students. Short stakes can cause injuries.
- Tell students what they should do if they uncover glass or other sharp objects.

**Teachable moments:**

- Most insects in the garden are harmless. Use the opportunity to educate the kids about them.
- Be ready to teach about worms, and do not allow students to cut them in two. Teach respect for living things.
- Teach the children what plants are edible (age appropriate).

**Afterwards:**

- Wash hands, gloves and all equipment after gardening. The use of cotton gardening gloves reduces the time to wash off the grime.
- Store shovels on the ground, against a wall or in a garbage can.