

Natural Playgrounds Company Starts New Design Trend

The Natural Playgrounds Company designs unique, natural playgrounds using natural features and components to create fun and challenging playscapes and outdoor classrooms offering childcare centers, nature centers, schools, and communities maximum, sustainable play and learning value for less cost. Collaborative design process with students is a highly beneficial outcome that teaches real-world skills!

Concord, NH -- Kids now have a better option for outdoor play. The Natural Playgrounds Company is taking its successful design process to every corner of the US so kids have a better outdoor experience by playing in natural settings that also teach environmental responsibility.

“You’d be surprised to hear kids talk about traditional playgrounds,” says Ron King, founder of the Natural Playgrounds Company. “They’re critical of the limited challenges, and they’re very bored. How many times can they slide down a slide before wanting to try something different?”

And that, says King, architect and play environment and playground designer, was how his company started five years ago.

“We’ve talked to over 3,000 children, and they all said the same thing. They’d much rather be playing in the water, digging in the sand, climbing a tree, jumping over a chasm, or walking on a trail than trying to play on a hot playground full of metal and plastic equipment.”

“We were bored!” said fourth-grader Liza Fridon. “We did the monkey rings, and then we’d swing for 50 swings. That’s all we’re allowed ‘cause so many other kids wanted to swing. And then we’d go down the little slide a couple of times, but after that we’d just chase each other. There wasn’t anything else to do!”

Things are different now, King says. His company spent last fall working with all 532 students and their teachers on a design for something more exciting and challenging. Phase one was built this last spring and summer at far less cost than a traditional metal and plastic playground.

“Our interactive slide show gets everyone on the same page, talking about natural playgrounds and what they are. Then we teach everyone the design process so they understand how to develop an idea into something that can be built.

“Every child has to build a small scale model using natural materials, and then explain to everyone what’s in it and how kids would play with the various features. The models are really quite extraordinary, and we take pictures of them all!”

According to King, many features the kids dream up in their models actually become part of the final design. This keeps his company on its toes evaluating ideas and finding ways to build them while assuring the kids that their ideas really do count.

“It’s very exciting,” said Jamie Fish, “to see our ideas actually being built! I never knew how to make an idea, but now I’m thinking I’d like to do this when I grow up. I can bring my brother and my mother here, and show them what I did.”

Part of the process, King said, is to involve the kids in the construction phase. This way they get to work with their hands and to use all the information they've been learning in the classroom about math and measurement, for instance. And because the projects are integrated throughout the school's curriculum, other disciplines are pulled in as well.

"We have students doing research on embankment slides and kid-safe lumber. Others research local regulations. Others make presentations to the school board and PTO to get support.

"Some kids take progress photos, and then have to write the story and learn how to post it on the school's website and get it in the school's newspaper. They're the ones that also keep up the project bulletin board in the school's front entrance.

"But most exciting for them, is the actual building. We teach them how to use tools – levels, screw guns, squares, saws, tape measures. They use post hole diggers, shovels, and rakes, and learn how to plumb a post and mix concrete to hold it up."

According to King, it's not unusual for teachers to tell him that the students learn more working with him outside for a week than they learn in the classroom.

The end result?

"Unbelievable," said a very excited Fish and Fridon. "We now have a huge mountain in the middle of our playground! We wanted one for sliding in the winter and summer, and for boulder climbing, and now we have one!

"We also have a big fitness trail with all kinds of fun things on it. And there's a chimney climb and a peg climber, and there's going to be an amphitheater and a whole pipe chime orchestra and a big shade arbor with game tables and a new forest with a nature trail. There's so much different stuff to do now!"

And that, says King, is the idea behind natural playgrounds, which teach children about nature while they play and have fun in a very safe environment.

Additional information, pictures of natural play area designs, articles about natural play, and places to find funding are provided at the Natural Playgrounds Company website, [naturalplaygrounds.com](http://www.naturalplaygrounds.com).

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