

Introducing the Outdoor Classroom

First United Church Nursery School transformed their school playground during the month of August, 2010, into an outdoor classroom. A ribbon cutting on September 8th officially opened the school year and introduced the renovated space to children and parents.



The traditional climbing equipment, sand box and tricycle/scooter roadway are still in place, but there are many additions. A committee of the school staff worked with a playground design consultant over the summer to include a richer variety of experiences with a focus on nature. There is a fabulous “tree cookie flooring” area with a natural cedar shelf unit filled with a variety of rocks, pine cones and tree limbs for building and design; a deck area for water play activities, dancing with colored scarves, dramas created on the spot and music explorations with a fabulous wooden marimba, rain sticks and gourd shakers; a raised planter box for gardening; and a large balance scale for measuring rocks, shells and acorns. A new playhouse, basketball pole and rim and sand play wall have also been added. The new outdoor classroom supports science, music, dramatic play, math, art and, of course, gross motor development, all in a natural setting.



The Nursery School staff have been challenged with concepts from Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv. His premise is that the current generation of children may be suffering from “nature deficit disorder.” Today’s children spend more time indoors with electronic gadgets and their time outdoors is often in organized sports and closely supervised activities. The First United teachers are committed to providing more open ended natural play opportunities for the school’s children, both in the newly renovated outdoor space and in visits to Austin Garden and Scoville Park. These two local parks are each one block from the school and the front yard of First United Church has a labyrinth and extensive gardens and trees for exploration.