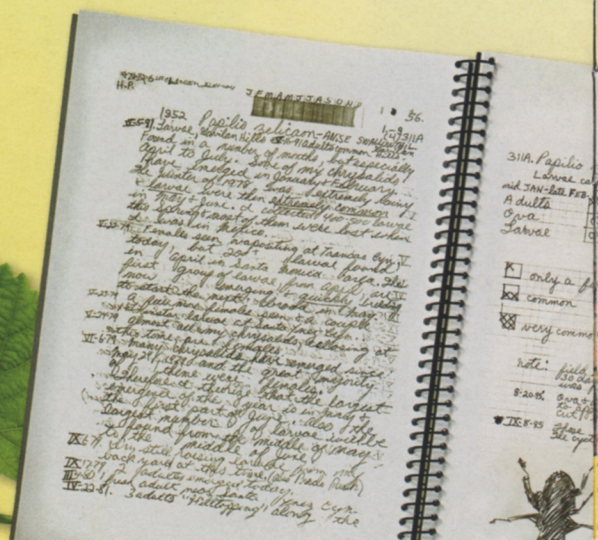


# Nature's Classroom

What's the best way to learn about nature and science? Sure, you can read a book. That's a great start. But there are other ways too. One of the best is to go outside and do experiments.

That is why many schools are building outdoor classrooms. They want to give students a chance to learn science by doing. Those schools are going on nature quests.

One school in Valley Cottage, New York, has done just that. Folks built a large outdoor classroom where students can learn not only science, but health and good citizenship. Guess what: It worked. Scores on state science tests have gone up—way up.





Valley Cottage Elementary School

## What Happened?

Starting about two years ago, students, teachers, parents, and community leaders came together. They planned and built an outdoor classroom. They built a bog and pond. They also made vegetable, herb, and butterfly gardens.

Students study the birds, fish, and other animals that come into the outdoor classroom. They even use microscopes to look at tiny critters living in the pond.

One of the best parts, explained teacher Helen Davies, is that kids get a firsthand look at life cycles. They see all the stages in the lives of both plants and animals.

## Good Eats

At the end of last school year, the school finished another project—a greenhouse. The greenhouse is a very important part of the outdoor classroom.

You see, the growing season in New York is very short. Yet students can start growing plants in the greenhouse. They move them to the garden when the weather warms up.

“Because of the greenhouse, we can start growing plants about two months earlier,” said school principal Brenda Grier.

That is very important. Students grow carrots, cucumbers, lettuce, potatoes, and tomatoes in the greenhouse and garden. They take care of the plants. Later, they will eat those plants as part of school lunches. The students don’t just learn where food comes from. They learn about good nutrition too.

In addition to learning a lot, students do something else. They have a lot of fun. You can too. Turn the page to see how.

