

Sustainable Schoolyards in Action: *The Outdoor Experience and Our Little Prairie at Our Lady of Providence School*

By Eddie Jones

What was once a tangle of honeysuckle and locust trees in a drainage ditch behind Our Lady of Providence School (OLP) in St. Louis County has been transformed, with the assistance of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), into a woodland rain garden dubbed, *The Outdoor Experience*.

The name appropriately conveys the role of the site in the life of the school as students have opportunity, right in their own schoolyard, to experience local ecology in a way that enhances learning. The LREC staff got wind of *The Outdoor Experience* through Volunteer Educator Diane Dubois, and it has quickly become a model schoolyard learning site for the ecology center. Lynn Holler, a member of the OLP school community, led restoration efforts and continues to effectively facilitate the restoration and educational use of the site.

Last year, 1st graders, with assistance of MDC and LREC, seeded and transplanted prairie plants at the edge of the woodland to initiate *Our Little Prairie*, which burst into bloom this summer with a dazzling display of color. Lynn recently reported that the two outdoor places are “really catching on. More teachers are taking the kids out when appropriate with their curriculum.” The OLP students, along with parents and teachers, are participating in rich outdoor learning experiences while beautifying the neighborhood and enhancing wildlife habitat. ☪



Our Lady of Providence School

Location: 8874 Pardee Road
St. Louis, MO 63123

Grades: Pre-school through 8th grade

Student Enrollment: about 200

Classrooms visiting LREC: 1

Website: <http://www.olp-school.org/>

Above: Our Little Prairie in May 2009 (photo by Eddie Jones).
Below: Our Little Prairie in September 2009 (photo by Lynn Holler).

