



A Sustainability Resource Kit for Early Childhood Educators





About the Program

What is Growing Minds Greening Communities?

Growing Minds Greening Communities (GMGC) was a 2 year sustainability education project funded by the NSW Environmental Trust which involved 21 child care centres in the Shellharbour Local Government Area and their families. The program was facilitated by 2 staff from the Environment Team at Shellharbour City Council and aimed to help child care centres and their families to reduce their impact on- and build an appreciation for- the natural environment.

Why did we run this program?

The program was undertaken to assist centres in the Shellharbour Local Government Area to overcome the challenges associated with integrating sustainable practices and learning opportunities into their service. GMGC'S approach differed from other similar programs in that it strongly encouraged involvement from families, including those in low socio-economic areas, through the provision of resources and activities centred on sustainability topics. This approach aimed to reinforce key messages to children, embedding sustainability in daily routines.

Our achievements

Over the course of the project, staff from participating centres took part in 18 workshops and events. These inspired over 250 actions to reduce the impact of the participating centres on the environment as well as over 200 sustainability based centre run activities for children.

In addition over 1100 residents took part in 15 family-friendly events over the course of the program. These included a family fun day, baby and kids market, campfires, spotlighting, marine creatures activity, coastal explorer adventure and mini beasts activities.

What is the aim of this guide?

The aim of this guide is to help your centre on its own sustainability journey. Whether you're just starting out or are looking for new ideas, this guide is for you! It contains a host of specific examples of initiatives that were undertaken by the participating centres as well as some top tips for embedding sustainability into your service.

For more information about GMGC contact Shellharbour City Council's Environment Team on 4221 6111 or email sustainability@shellharbour.nsw.gov.au

Feedback from our participants

“ Today’s event was inspiring. It’s been great sharing ideas as well as struggles and knowing other centres have similar issues ”

“ Thanks for getting this project up and running. We are lucky to have something like this in Shellharbour ”



Painting pet rocks at Shellharbour Kidsfest

“ A huge thank you for the opportunity to participate in tonight’s sustainability presentation. Ready to put this learning into practice ”

“ What we’ve liked most about GMGC is learning so much about embedding environmental sustainability into our childhood setting. I joined GMGC at the same time that I took on the role as environmental educator. It gave me knowledge and confidence to share information with staff and children ”

“ This program has given us new ideas, great information, resources and networking within the local community ”

“ The practical hands on component of GMGC has been brilliant. It’s helped us to gain more confidence to incorporate more aspects of sustainability within the centre. Our garden has become a great focal point for children and families and is continuing to thrive. It has also been extremely beneficial with regards to preparation for our assessment and ratings process ”

Being green may be easier than you think!

Over the course of our program the participating centres identified a range of constraints which impacted on their ability to operate more sustainability and provide environmentally-based learning opportunities for children.

We found that often barriers such as time, knowledge, available budget and staff turnover can seem insurmountable however careful planning can remove or reduce many of these hurdles.

When planning for sustainability some of the most important things to consider include gaining support from directors and business owners, setting up effective communication channels with staff and families, and identifying those who may be able to help you along the way.

The following tips are designed to help you kick things off on the right foot and identify ways of saving time and money as you transition to becoming a sustainable service.

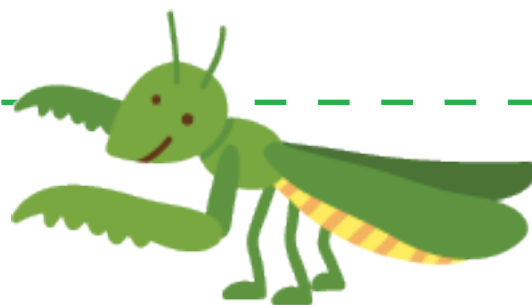
Tips for greening your centre

- **Gain support** - The centres that have been most successful in greening their services have made a conscious decision to make sustainability an integral part of the way they operate, rather than simply an add on. These centres have set green foundations with the support of their Director and owner and involve many staff in sustainability initiatives they undertake
- **Keep it simple** - Start off introducing smaller, low cost measures and then work your way up to more complex projects that require a greater investment of time and money
- **Get advice from people and groups in the know** - There are a range of community groups that can provide you with free or low cost advice. Don't know where to start? Check out the list on page 30. Find out if there are any local centres that are working towards sustainability goals or who have completed similar projects and get in touch with them
- **Learn by doing rather than just talking** - Practicing new skills is the best way of getting them to become part your routine. Get as many staff and kids involved as possible
- **Look for opportunities to get families involved** - There a range of ways families can get involved in greening your centre. They may be able to collect resources for nature play or recycled craft activities, or provide man power to complete that nature play area you've been dreaming of! Decide how you will let them know about opportunities they can get involved in. You might like to include information in your newsletter, on your website or on your facebook site
- **Encourage creativity and resourcefulness** - Don't be afraid to try something new. It may not always work but you'll learn a lot along the way! Creativity and resourcefulness can often keep project costs down
- **Funding options for your projects** - You don't always need a large budget to make significant changes to your centre. There are a range of low cost measures that you can complete before tackling some of the more expensive options. Where you have a costly project in mind, it is a good idea to plan ahead so that you can fundraise and/or allocate funding from your internal budget. You can also search online for funding opportunities that are available to both not-for-profit and private centres

Tips for greening your centre...continued

- **Look for ways to minimise any impacts on your workload** - Being green doesn't have to mean more work! There are many ways you can reduce your environmental impact without placing a burden on your time. There are a range of simple and low cost measures you can integrate into your existing routine that take little to no extra time but can have big results. Start off with low effort actions and work your way up to more time consuming projects and allocate staff time accordingly
- **Look for ways to streamline paperwork** - Keep a record of your sustainability actions, but rather than writing a range of reports for different purposes, why not consider developing a standard template that can easily be modified to suit a range different purposes? This may include text you would like to include in your newsletter to families, facebook or website posts, daily journals and QIP reporting. This will save you a considerable amount of time and ensure you're keeping valuable records of all your achievements!
- **Keep everyone in the loop** - Communicate progress and new initiatives to the whole team including new staff. You may choose to do this by adding a new item to your regular team meeting agenda and documenting important information in a central location that is accessible to the whole team
- **Tell your families about your projects** - Let your families know about your progress on your sustainability journey. It may even prompt them to live greener at home! Add all new sustainability goals and sustainable practises to your Parent Orientation Manual
- **Celebrate your successes** - Don't forget to let staff know their efforts have been appreciated by recognising their achievements. Such an important step that can often get overlooked
- **Share your stories with other external educators** - Join a network and start sharing your ideas. You'll be rewarded with inspiration for your next projects with tips and tricks to avoid common pitfalls and maximise your achievements, saving you time and money

Actions and activities that you can do at your centre



Throughout the course of GMGC participating centres completed over 250 actions to reduce their impact on the environment as well as over 200 sustainability based centre run activities for children. A selection of these actions and activities together with a range of additional ideas are listed below and are ranked in terms of ease of implementation, material costs and staff time.

Use these lists as a starting point to inspire projects at your centre. Trying some of the easier and low cost actions and activities can build confidence and motivation!



Energy

Actions to keep your energy use and bills down

Lower effort and/or cost	Actions	Tick when complete
	Maximise the use of natural light and ventilation throughout the day	
	Turn off lights each day during rest time	
	Place signs near all light switches, air conditioners and power points to act as reminders to turn off when not needed	
	Use a check list at the end of each day to make sure all unnecessary lights and electric appliances are turned off (at the power point)	
	Use fans where possible instead of air conditioners	
	Use correct temperature settings on air conditioners (18-20 degrees in winter and 24-25 degrees in summer) and section off rooms when heating or cooling to maximise efficient use of energy	
	Make sure children are appropriately dressed requiring less use of heating and cooling appliances	
	Tell your families about the actions you are taking to reduce energy use. Include energy saving tips in your newsletter. It might inspire families to look at ways to reduce their own energy use!	
	Always use cold water for washing, wait for a full load before running the machine and use the ecocycle function where available	
	Minimise the use of clothes dryers. Use the clothes line rather than clothes dryer in all but wet weather	
	Conduct an energy audit to eliminate unnecessary power use, and compare energy bills when available – this is very motivating for staff and children	
	Consider purchasing accredited GreenPower	
	Switch to more energy efficient lighting	
	When purchasing new or replacement electric appliances, consider the need before purchasing, then look for ones with high energy star ratings. The more stars the more savings!	
	Install sensor lights in infrequently used areas	
	Consider separate lighting for different areas so each needs only to be on when necessary	
	Reduce heating through west facing windows using awnings, tinted windows and/or blinds	
	Higher effort and/or cost	Consider installing a solar hot water
	Consider installing a solar power system	



The energy star rating scheme helps you select the most energy efficient appliances



Identifying energy uses at an EcoSmart workshop



Energy

Activities for kids



Activities

Select energy monitors that are responsible for identifying lights that have been left on as well as proper use of heating and cooling appliances. Energy monitors are recognised by way of a special tag or poster

Encourage discussions with children about climate change and how to save energy at the centre

Make up a story about saving energy using photos or drawings of the children participating in energy saving actions. Alternatively you could make up a song about saving energy that you could perform to parents

Run children's activities in conjunction with annual Earth Hour event (end of March)

Use small, fold up laundry racks so that children can hang out smaller items while staff hang out bigger items. Talk about the best days for drying the laundry outdoors or where to place the rack indoors for best results

Practise reading a thermometer with children. Talk about what temperatures are the most comfortable indoors and how to reach those temperatures without using electric appliances

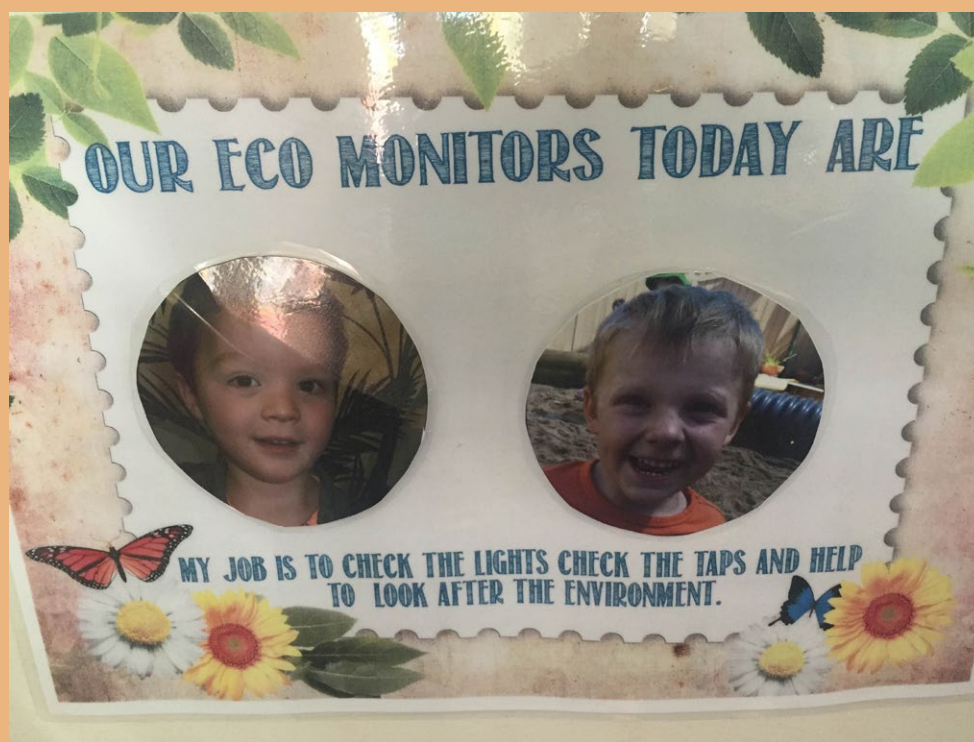
Learn about static energy – children can rub a balloon on their hair and use the charged energy to pick up small bits of paper

Source solar energy kits such as lights, fans or solar powered toys

Make kites and fly them as a tool to discuss wind energy

Make a wind sock and take note of the direction of the wind throughout the day

If you have a dolls house, create items to make it more sustainable such as a solar panels, solar hot water system, as well as other features such as a water tank, vegie garden and compost bin. Discuss why each of these items has been added. If you don't have a dolls house, you could draw a sustainable house together and discuss energy saving features



*Eco Monitors at
SeaView Preschool*



Waste

Actions to reduce your centre's waste to landfill

Lower effort and/or cost	Actions	Tick when complete
	Use reusable shopping bags every time you shop instead of plastic bags	
	Ask staff to be aware of packaging waste and encourage them to seek out products with low to no packaging	
	Ask families to bring in recyclable items for children's activities and set up a 'useful box' in each room to store them in. Encourage children to build and create using the recyclable items	
	Set up paper collection points in each craft area and encourage kids to re-use one sided paper	
	Encourage families to reduce food packaging by introducing a package free lunch box initiative	
	Train staff on how to recycle more effectively – ask your local Council about their waste avoidance workshops	
	Place colour coded bins in each room or in a central location (red – general waste, yellow – recycling)	
	Assess whether you need to increase the number of recycling bins	
	Identify families who will take excess organic waste home for their own compost or worm farm	
	Introduce a worm farm and/or compost bin to your service and provide training for all staff in how to use it	
	Use worm castings and juice from your worm farm on your vegie garden. You may also like to consider selling worm juice to families as a fundraiser to buy more vegie seedlings	
	Reassess the number of general waste (red lidded) bins and frequency of pick up following the introduction of measures to reduce organic waste to landfill	
	Look for opportunities to use recycled materials or unwanted offcuts from parents when planning new spaces or making changes to existing spaces	
	Move to online programming and notifications so that children's documentation and newsletters are not printed out	
Higher effort and/or cost		



Worm farming at Mission Australia Early Learning Centre



Super worm juice fundraiser at Barrack Heights Community Preschool



Waste

Activities for kids



Activities

Talk about where paper comes from and why it's important to recycle. Make recycled paper from used paper

Supply recycled materials for art projects and play activities including cubby building

Organise a visit from a local waste service educator to deliver worm farming or composting activities or organise a visit from a garbage truck!

Take a visit to a waste processing facility to demonstrate where our waste goes

Encourage children to sort their own lunch time rubbish into the correct bins including the recycling bin, compost bin, worm farm and general rubbish bin

Select waste monitors to make sure the correct items are placed in each bin

Create compost treasure hunt where children search the centre for items that can be added to your compost bin

Involve children in taking care of your worm farm and discuss and make signage for the types of food worms like and don't like to eat

Make signage to show what can and can't be placed in your compost bin

Involve kids in basic repair activities rather than throwing things away

Get involved in National Recycling Week (held annually in November). For more information visit <http://recyclingweek.planetark.org/about/>

Encourage discussions about where your rubbish goes and that there is limited space in our landfills. Make up a story or poem about recycling, composting or worm farming using photos of drawings of the children participating in waste avoidance activities. Alternatively you could make up a waste song to perform to parents.



Feeding scraps to the worms at Wallaroo Children's Centre



Composting activities with Sue Fletcher from Remondis at Mission Australia Early Learning Centre



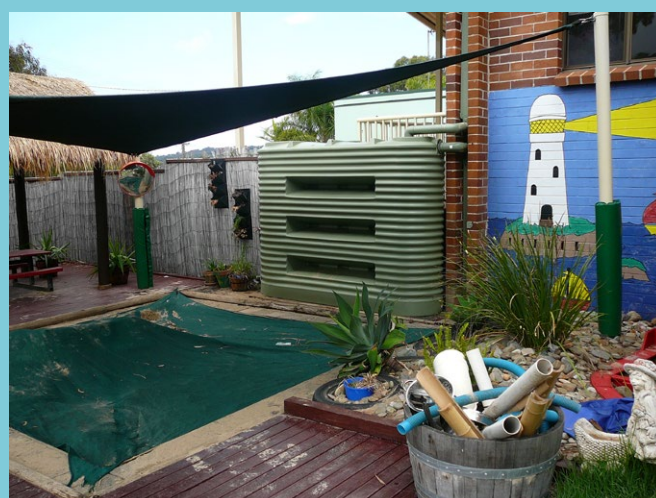
Water

Actions to keep
your water use
and bills down

Lower effort and/or cost	Actions	Tick when complete
	Use the eco cycle on washing machines and dishwashers and only run when full	
	Use a full sink of water to wash or soak items such as art supplies rather than use running water from the tap	
	Tell your families about the actions you are taking to reduce water use. Include water saving tips in your newsletter. It might inspire families to look at ways to reduce their own water use!	
	Investigate the opportunity to label bed sheets so they can be reused for the same child on consecutive days	
	Increase mulching of gardens to prevent evaporation to reduce garden's watering needs	
	Conduct a water audit to eliminate unnecessary water use, and compare water bills when available – this is very motivating for staff and children	
	Locate your water meter and take manual water meter readings. Consecutive readings at the end of a day and first thing in the morning will reveal if water is being lost outside business hours. Ensure timely repair of identified leaks	
	When purchasing water using fixtures and appliances, select those with the highest water efficiency rating (using the WELS star rating scheme)	
	Install low flow taps including push taps to prevent water wastage through taps being left on	
	Ensure all toilets (for both staff and children) are converted to dual flush toilets	
Higher effort and/or cost	Install a rainwater tank with a gauge (if possible) and connect to toilets and washing machine. Monitor the gauge and relate this to how much water is available for play. Ensure water play and gardening only takes place with tank water	



WELS rating scheme helps you select the most water efficient fixtures and appliances



Rainwater tank at Koninderie Community Preschool



Water

Activities for kids



Activities

Provide watering cans for the children to assist with watering the garden

Encourage children to collect and measure water in containers using a range of different container sizes, funnels, plastic tubes

Encourage children to undertake floating and sinking experiments

Encourage general water play activities including fishing and washing up using a water tray

Discuss the different uses of water for plants, animals and growing food

Discuss water saving strategies and ask questions about why we need to save water

Make up a story about saving water using photos or drawings of the children participating in water saving actions. Alternatively you could make up a song about saving water that could be performed to parents

Create signage to be placed above taps to remind children to turn off taps after use

Select water monitors to make sure taps aren't left on

Collect leftover water from drinks and water play to water the garden

Undertake discussions about the water cycle and how water gets to our homes and child care centre. Ask the children to draw the water cycle

Create a water wall with recycled materials and use buckets to collect the water at the end so it can be reused.



Fishing at Koninderie Community Based Preschool



Watering the garden at Terry St Kids





Nature Play

Actions which will provide nature play opportunities at your centre

Lower effort and/or cost	Actions	Tick when complete
	Introduce more plants both indoors and outdoors. Ensure all staff know the watering, light and feeding requirements of the plants you purchase. For the outdoors, look for native varieties that are low maintenance and have less watering requirements. These will also create habitat for local wildlife	
	Incorporate stones and other natural materials including shells, pebbles and pinecones into both the indoor and outdoor learning environments and encourage imaginative play	
	Create a mud pit or sand pit	
	Create a permanent display table with interesting natural and sensory elements such as leaves, seeds and shells	
	Construct a tee pee using bamboo and grow climbers such as beans over the frame to create unique and interesting spaces	
	Consider incorporating pets into your outdoor space e.g. rabbits, guinea pigs or chickens – these can all make excellent pets for young children	
Higher effort and/or cost	Undertake discussions with your children and families to find out what they would like to see in their outdoor play area. Talk about how you could incorporate more natural elements e.g. dry creek bed, logs and rounds for stepping stones, seating and balance beams, replace soft fall areas with sensory gardens and textured pathways	
	Hold a working bee involving parents to complete your nature play area	



Natural play space working bee held at Warilla Child Care Centre



Indoor nature play area at Curious Kids Early Learning Centre





Nature Play

Activities
for kids



Activities

Involve the children in growing flowers, herbs and veges. Flowers can encourage beneficial insects into your garden, herbs smell great and veges can be used to make a salad for the kids!

Grow plants from seed and monitor the growth process

Incorporate natural sensory elements into play e.g. adding herbs to play dough and smelling trays. You might like to use herbs such as mint, parsley, dill, rosemary and pineapple sage

Make mud pies in a mud pit!

Encourage activities that relate to different seasons (eg. raking leaves in autumn) and discuss the difference between seasons

Use timber off cuts as building blocks and in dramatic play

Make collages using natural materials such as leaves, dirt and sticks

Create ephemeral art using sticks, twigs, branches, string, flower heads, ferns and other greenery which are returned back to nature when the activity has finished

Make paints from natural materials, bark and rocks

Organise a visit from your local zoo, hire a butterfly enclosure or organise sea creatures or backyard minibeasts to visit your centre

Supervise tree climbing activities

Encourage children and families to bring in "natural treasures" and dedicate regular show and tell sessions to allow children to talk about their treasures

Watch tadpoles grow or look for lizards in your dry creek bed



Playing in the mud at Olitots
Preschool



Climbing trees at Terry St Kids





Biodiversity

Actions which will increase biodiversity at your centre

Lower effort and/or cost	Actions	Tick when complete
	Undertake discussions with children and families to find out how they would like to make changes to the outdoor area to support local biodiversity and nature play	
	Borrow a bug, reptile, bird or mammal collection through the Australian Museum's Museum in a Box program www.australianmuseum.net.au/museum-in-a-box	
	Put up native animal posters in your centre and try to identify visitors to your garden. For those in the Shellharbour Local Government Area, you might like to include the following posters found in the online resources section of this document on page 31. 'Frogs of the Illawarra', 'Butterflies of the Illawarra' and 'Illawarra Birds'	
	Plant a range of native plants in your garden to provide shelter, nesting and food for native animals and birds that might be passing through your centre's outdoor area. Include or retain trees and tall shrubs, dense or spikey lower shrubs, plants that provide fruit, nectar and seeds as well groundcover plants. Talk to your local nursery to select suitable plants for your centre	
	Tell your families about the actions you've completed to increase your centre's biodiversity. Include tips in your newsletter. It might inspire families to look at what they can do in their own yard!	
	Add mulch, logs and large flat rocks and stone piles for lizards, animals and insects	
	Add a nesting box to your outdoor area to replicate natural shelters such as tree hollows. They are fun, easy and cheap to make	
	Create a frog pond that is safe for children at your centre to access. For more information visit Kidsafe http://www.kidsafe.com.au/	
Higher effort and/or cost		



Watching tadpoles in the pond at Koninderie Community Based Preschool



Selection of plants ready to be planted at Warilla Child Care Centre to boost biodiversity





Biodiversity

Activities for kids



Activities

Undertake discussions with children about who they are sharing their outdoor play space with such as birds, insects, lizards, butterflies and what type of environments these animals and creatures need to live

Go on a “safari” at your centre or walk to a nearby park. Take some binoculars to spot birds and use magnifying glasses to observe small creatures and plants

Take photos of birds and animals you see and identify them using books and posters

Look for lizards around the “dry creek bed” or outdoor area where there are large stones

Observe and discuss the life cycles of different animals e.g. tadpoles – frogs

Use a flower press to dry flowers and identify different types of flowers and identify ones that are native to Australia

Work together to create habitat for different animals and minibeasts such as making nest boxes, using large flat rocks for lizards and planting seedlings. Discuss why we need to protect our plants and animals and create homes for them

Talk about the range of homes for animals and play a matching game – who lives where?

Make up a story about supporting local wildlife using photos or drawings of the children making animal homes in your outdoor area. Alternatively you could learn a song about native animals that you could perform to parents

Align activities with national and international events relating to biodiversity including National Sea Week (early March), National Tree Day (July), and Biodiversity Month and National Threatened Species Day (September)

Investigate opportunities to bring other wildlife experiences to your centre such as hiring a butterfly house, organising a visit from a zoo or marine education provider



Discovering minibeasts at Warilla Library with Rangers on the Run



Splash Into marine education activities at Warilla Library





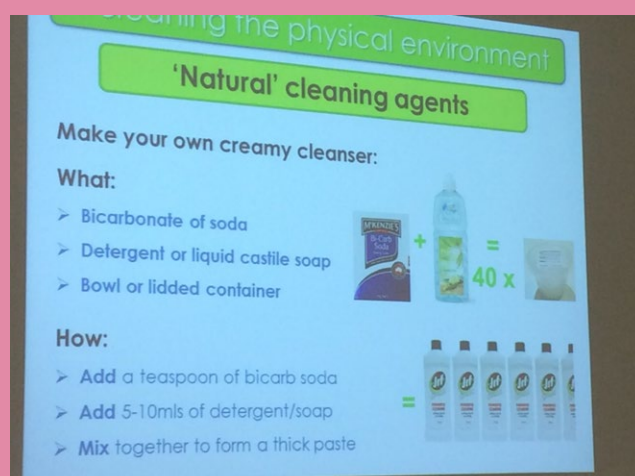
Smarter Shopping

Actions to help you shop smarter

Lower effort and/or cost	Actions	Tick when complete
	Shop for products that are made from recycled content eg. paper, toilet paper	
	Shop for items that have low to no packaging	
	Encourage families to reduce food packaging by introducing a package free lunch box initiative	
	Discuss with staff the different kinds of materials you could provide for children's activities that have a lower environmental footprint eg. wooden, handmade, recycled and may be reused	
	Avoid purchasing single use items eg. disposable cups	
	Tell your families about the actions you're taking to reduce your environmental impacts when shopping. Include smarter shopping tips in your newsletter. It might inspire families to look at ways they can reduce their environmental impacts!	
	Buy local/Australian made where possible	
	Try to purchase organic products (http://austorganic.com/) and Fair Trade products (http://fairtrade.com.au/) where possible	
	Contact your local men's shed to see if they will repair items for you rather than purchase new items	
	Consult the star rating of new energy and water using appliances when replacing failed ones	
Higher effort and/or cost	Undertake staff training to identify greener alternatives to common cleaning products and how to use them most effectively	



Albion Park Men's Shed workshop



Learning about green cleaning at a staff training workshop run by Bridget Gardner of Fresh Green Clean



Smarter Shopping

Activities
for kids



Activities

Provide reusable shopping bags for dramatic play

Discuss the impact of plastic bags on our environment

Provide opportunities for the children to put away groceries

Discuss where your groceries items have come from using a world map and local maps to compare the distance travelled by different items

Involve children in simple green cleaning activities

Provide a 'Take it Apart Box' for children to tinker away and create new items using parts of broken or unwanted items. Discuss why it is better for the environment to make and repair items rather than buy new ones

Involve children in growing and preparing food and discuss the benefits of growing your own food

Organise a local grower to visit the centre to talk to the children about the food they produced and why it's important to source local produce



Koninderie Community Based Preschool's 'Take it Apart Box'





Sustainable Food

Ways you can introduce sustainable food into your centre

Lower effort and/or cost	Actions	Tick when complete
	Purchase seasonal fruits and vegies when shopping	
	Support local farmers markets where possible	
	Establish a veggie garden and use the produce in cooking or give away to parents	
	Save seeds from your vegetables and grow into seedlings	
	Purchase and pot fruit trees	
	Include updates in your newsletter including what you're growing and what you've harvested. It might inspire families to start growing their own food!	
	Organise a staff training day at your local nursery or community garden to increase knowledge and confidence associated with growing food	
	Organise a working bee with parents and get them involved in your centre's vegie garden	
Higher effort and/or cost	Get together with other local child care services and create a food co-op. Buy non-perishable items in bulk and order fruit and vegies collectively from the growers	



Vegie gardening at Warilla Child Care Centre

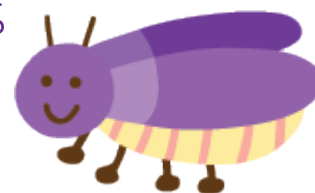


Staff no-dig veggie gardening workshop at Shellharbour City Council Nursery



Sustainable Food

Activities
for kids



Activities

Select children to monitor and look after your veggie garden

Make up a story about growing food using drawings or photos of the children participating in gardening activities. Alternatively you could learn a song about growing food that you could perform to parents

Involve children in establishing a salad patch and encourage them to harvest veggies to add to their lunches

Involve children in adding worm juice from your worm farm to the garden and discuss how nutrients from unwanted food can be returned back to the soil to assist in new growth

Contact your local community garden and/or nursery and organise a visit

Introduce a chicken coop or arrange for chickens to visit your centre and collect the eggs

Involve the children in making dough and bake bread that everyone can share

Make pizzas using herbs and veggies from your garden

Pick and eat fruit from the fruit trees

Organise a visit from local food growers or visit a local farmers market

Make a scarecrow for your veggie garden

Organise a bush tucker walk with local indigenous elders

Allow children to take seedlings home to start their own veggie garden with their family



Scarecrow making at Albion Park
Early Learning Centre



Visiting the chickens at Terry St Kids

Case studies from participating centres



Koninderie Community Based Preschool

At Koninderie Preschool we implement sustainability practices on a daily basis. We have a strong commitment to using natural and recycled materials for children's indoor/outdoor play and art/craft activities.

Our outdoor environment has been designed to incorporate as many natural elements as possible including a large garden consisting of different kinds of plants for our children to wander through and explore. Down in our sandpit we have a large water tank that collects the rain water from the down pipes. We use this water in the sand pit and mud pit for water play and we also use it to water our vegetable garden, flowers and plants.

Our vegetable garden consists of lettuce, beetroot, cauliflower, beans, strawberries and a mandarin tree. Our compost is used to fertilise our vegetable garden and the worm juice from our worm farm is also used to give our veges a drink.

Our fort/climbing area is embedded into a large mound of earth and is surrounded by plants and rocks. The children love to climb up onto the rocks to the slippery dip and then slide back down. We quite often have visits from Rosellas and different birds who come and perch in our trees. A fairy garden can be found in our play space too, it was made from an old existing tree trunk.

During our daily routine two of our children are given the job of being Eco Monitors. Their job is to remind their friends, during hand washing time, to put paper towel in the bin and ensure the taps are turned off. This helps promote an awareness of being water wise and keeping our bathroom safe and clean. During our morning tea and lunch times, another two children are given the job to assist their friends by ensuring their food scraps, rubbish and paper bags are placed into the correct bins.

These are just some of the ways Koninderie is involved in caring for our environment and ensuring that sustainability is embedded into our daily practices.



Sea View Preschool



At SeaView Preschool in Blackbutt we have begun to transform our centre into a green, eco-friendly, sustainable service.

Since the commencement of Growing Minds Greening Communities, we have implemented several changes and made some sustainable additions to our centre. One of these initiatives is the introduction of the “Eco Monitor”. The “Eco Monitor” is a child focussed program, where each morning two children are chosen to be our Eco Monitors. Some of the special privileges that come with being an Eco Monitor for the day is wearing a special lanyard around their neck, having their photo on the Eco Monitor Poster and receiving an award at the end of the day. Part of their role, as Eco Monitor, is to monitor the use of electricity and water within the service. The Eco Monitor regularly checks the bathroom for dripping taps, ensures lights are turned off once we have left the rooms, and ensures that the air conditioner is switched off when we head outside, and checking that the doors are closed when the air conditioner is on.

Another project that we have added is our vegetable and herb garden, which we are very happy to say is flourishing! The children love helping each day to water the vegetables, and check the growth of our herbs and veggies. We planted all of our plants from seeds, and are very pleased to say that last week we used our own home grown lettuce for lunch on our salad sandwiches. The children also pick our fresh strawberries and eat these throughout the day and we use our herbs chopped up in our home made play dough to extend on our sensory experiences.

The children are thoroughly enjoying becoming more environmentally aware, and have enjoyed taking on greater responsibility and independence for both our centre, and for the environment. One of our classroom rules is to “Look after your environment”, which means everything around us. As educators we are pleased to have been a part of GMGC and know that this has improved our teachings around sustainability and the environment and know it will not only benefit us but our children as well.



Seascope Early Learning Centre

Seascope children are actively involved in environmental sustainability through their “Green Team” program. Each week the children take turns in watering, planting and observing the garden. The children also collect scraps to keep the worms happy and then collect the worm juice to water the garden with and to offer to families so they can use it in their own garden.

By connecting the children with the worm farm, the children are learning how to care and produce healthy food from the garden. Our veggie patch is a valuable asset to the centre. Since we have had our garden we have already successfully grown tomatoes, celery, watermelon, basil, broccoli and capsicum. The children are able to watch as the seedlings turn into sprouts and eventually end up on their plate for lunch!

Through having the veggie patch it has encouraged more learning on the types of food that is available to us and where it comes from. This includes discussing and featuring different foods and how they are produced. The children were able to share their own stories on gardens they had at home.

As well as collecting scraps for the worm farm, Seascope staff and children are actively reducing their environmental impact by recycling and passing this message on to families.



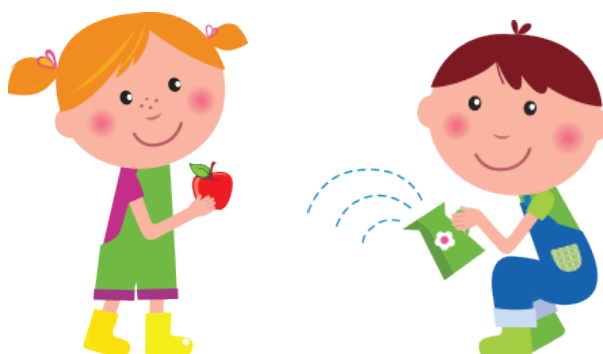
Wallaroo Children's Centre

A goal set through the Quality Improvement Plan by Wallaroo was to take an active role in caring for our environment and embed sustainable practices at the service and into the wider community. With the establishment of a new natural outdoor environment and the Growing Minds Greening Communities program, an opportunity was available for educators to foster children's capacity to value and respect their environment.

The children at Wallaroo are actively involved with the natural outdoor play space. The children help with planting, worm farming and composting as well as harvesting vegetables from the garden and through these actions, take ownership of their environment.

The centre actively encourages sustainability through a "green team" of educators who drive sustainable change. Each educator is tasked with an area they monitor such as composting, worm farming, veggie gardening, sustainable shopping and recycling and as the children gain skills and knowledge in these topics, the educators guide the actions rather than needing to drive the change.

The educators facilitate and extend upon sustainability through providing resources to the children including the installation of a veranda garden in the 2-3 room and hanging strawberry pots. Wallaroo have also created a link to the wider community through the establishment of a community garden with the Elanora Nursing home.



Shellharbour TAFE Children's Centre



Here at Shellharbour TAFE Children's Centre, one of our goals was to create an edible garden with the children. In order to invite participation we encouraged families to bring in seeds or plants from their own garden to share in creating a 'Family Garden'.

The children assisted in the process of preparing the soil, planting and caring for the new seedlings and of course, eating the produce!

The whole process allowed for some spontaneous discussions and observations regarding what plants need for growth, how they differ visually and by scent and why we need plants and trees, and composting.

The children have embraced the composting process, taking fruit and vegetable peelings, paper towel, grass clippings and leaf litter and placing into the compost bin.

Our 'Family Garden' continues to be a work in progress, tending to the plants and adding seedlings as they come into season, affording rich learning opportunities for the children.



Warilla Baptist Preschool

Warilla Baptist Preschool have a focus on using recycled materials, donated offcuts and locally sourced materials for any play space projects that take place in the centre. Some examples include building seats for the children and repurposing materials into tables and storage spaces.

One of the children's favourite play spaces at the moment is the dirt pit. The staff have found that it is a great way to engage in a fun, sensory experience whilst working as a team and sharing skills. The dirt pit has been filled with left over gravel and dirt from a landscaping job that was being completed around the corner from the preschool. A local builder donated some hard hats, and one of the dads had some old fence palings that he gave to the children as well. At the moment the favourite activity is trying to dig a hole to the bottom – they haven't quite made it there yet. There are also gumboots for the children to wear in the dirt pit to keep feet safe while the children play.

Warilla Baptist Preschool also received one of Council's small environmental grants in 2013 and were able to purchase and plant some tasty fruit trees and have integrated the care and watering of the fruit trees and vegetable garden into the daily routines with the children.



Mission Australia Early Learning Centre - Shell Cove



At Mission Australia Early Learning we embrace recycling and reusing as a part of our everyday practice. We have set up recycling boxes in the foyer which encourage children and families to bring in recyclable objects which the children can use at the centre. The children love choosing their own materials and it allows great opportunity to discuss the importance of recycling and reusing with the children.

We have also established a compost bin and worm farm which the children are actively involved in maintaining. We organised a compost treasure hunt around the centre looking for items to add to our 'Compost Stew'. The children then took a Compost Recipe home to see what they could find around their own homes.

The children at MAEL are actively involved in planting and maintaining our vegetable garden. They have watched the whole process from seed to plant to fruit and into their lunchtime meal. They have been part of collecting seeds and replanting them to grow new plants.

Being involved in the Growing Minds Greening Communities has allowed educators the opportunity to reflect on various aspects of environmental sustainability in our service. We continue to grow and develop and are constantly working in collaboration with the children, families and staff to create a beautiful, sustainable environment to learn, play and grow.

Terry Street Kids

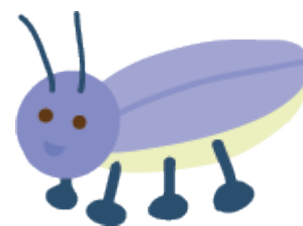


Terry Street Kids have been having a great time raising their chickens. The chickens were a part of a program that allows centres to keep fertile eggs under an incubator until they hatch. The eggs hatched over a number of days allowing the children to observe the baby chicks breaking out of their shells. The centre has kept 3 chickens and the remainder of the chickens were adopted by families.

The staff from Terry Street Kids have brought their environmental philosophies and knowledge to the GMGC project, sharing many of their great ideas with other centres, suggesting activities that they regularly involve the children such as hanging the washing out to dry in the tree, feeding and caring for the chickens and planting and tending to the garden.

Warilla Occasional Care Centre

Warilla Occasional Care Centre have been doing some great things to reduce their waste to landfill. They have a thriving worm farm and have had Sue Fletcher from Remondis Waste Services come and teach the children all about recycling and worm farming. The centre was recognised for their excellent recycling practices, receiving an “Awesome Recycler” award from Council during a random waste audit. They have also been utilising their GMGC display board to promote waste free lunches and increasing the awareness of local families to the benefits of a healthy lunchbox. This idea has also been carried through into their veggie patch where they have grown some fantastic lettuce, beetroot, celery and beans for families to take home. The worm farm has also been a great success and the centre now offers “worm tea” to families to take home and use on their own gardens as a natural fertiliser.



Olitots Preschool



Being involved in the Growing Minds Greening Communities has inspired Olitots' educators, children and families to be more proactive in looking after the environment and exploring how to be sustainable at a preschool level.

As a team they have maintained a worm farm with fruit scraps collected after meals. The worm wee and castings are then used to fertilise their vegetable and herb gardens. Produce from the gardens is shared with families and used in cooking experiences within the preschool. Most recently Olitots used beetroot from the garden to make beetroot juice. They have also placed herbs in decorative jars around the preschool and use

herbs in kids' activities such as play dough, with their favourite being peppermint play dough.

Since beginning the GMGC program the educators have critically reflected on how they could improve on sustainability and identified that a significant amount of food waste was being sent to landfill each day. The educators then spoke to people in the local community and found that a neighbour had chickens who would appreciate their food scraps. The children often listen to the chickens across the fence laying their eggs and the neighbours are kind enough to share the eggs with the families at the preschool.



Albion Park Early Learning Centre

Albion Park Early Learning Centre (APELC) has also focused on reducing waste from their centre. They have collected recyclable materials as well as natural materials from the garden for use in art and craft. A recycled table has also been set up as a nature space and hosts a collection of different native plants, sand and bugs for the children to explore through the day. Outside, the children have been tending to the veggie patch by planting out the winter veggies and watering them. The veggie garden also ties into the theme of healthy eating, which has been further emphasised recently with a visit from a local dentist.

Since commencing with the GMGC program, APELC educators have completed a sustainability plan and are working toward the goals that have been set. In addition to reducing waste, the current focus is on conserving energy and water. Some of the actions they have completed include allowing more natural light into the building, installing water saving taps and having recycling bins that the children can access. The centre is also planning to create more habitat for native animals by replanting the front garden with Australian native shrubs.

Flinders Cove Early Learning Centre

At Flinders Cove we are very conscious of sustainability. One of the children's favourite activities is creative play using recycled materials. A constant supply of recycled materials is kept under the craft table, replenished by families and staff. The materials lend themselves to imaginative play because of their odd shapes, sizes and textures. Some of the children's creations include boats with family and friends on board and Elsa's ice tower as well as homes of various shapes and sizes. Natural materials also feature highly at Flinders Cove and the children have access to different types of natural materials at all times including twigs, bark, leaves, pine cones and shells. The materials are great tools for inquisitive minds and the children thoroughly enjoy organising the materials by sorting and matching as well as sensory play through touch, smell and looking through the magnifying glass.

Outside at Flinders Cove the children involve themselves in role play in our wooden cubby house and the pot plants have brightened up the outdoor area with some colourful flowers. Some newly planted trees will eventually provide us with more shade and the vegetable garden has been flourishing with the added benefit of fertiliser from the compost bin. We have some cherry tomatoes, basil, parsley, broccoli and lettuce growing and it is very exciting to try these with our lunches. The water tank is great for us to water the gardens, trees and pot plants with watered down worm juice from the worm farm in our recycled milk bottle watering bottles. Sustainability is all around our centre and we love looking for and implementing new ideas.



Curious Kids Early Learning Centre

There's a great vibe at Curious Kids! When you enter the front doors you are greeted with a wonderful assortment of natural materials, brought together to emphasise the mantra of the Early Years Learning Framework - being, belonging and becoming. In all the rooms children have access to natural materials for play including pieces of leaves, twigs and flower parts for craft, puzzles, logs for building blocks, clay and twigs for creative play and a nature wall where interesting finds can be displayed. Recycling is encouraged in all rooms and the children can clearly see what can be placed in recycling bins.

Outside, the walk to the playspace is lined with fruit trees, herbs and flowers and the children help manage the garden and feed the compost bin with food scraps. The play space mirrors the inside and provides a great assortment of natural materials including logs, stones, sand, polished timber, ropes and plants.

The staff are actively involved in maintaining the centre and seeking out new and interesting natural materials to add to the collection. The centre also aims for a high level of energy efficiency and has become a model for Seaview Preschool with both centres comparing energy bills and seeking ways to reduce their energy consumption.



Warilla Child Care Centre

On the 9th of March Growing Minds Greening Communities hosted a nature play space workshop at Warilla Child Care Centre. The workshop, facilitated by Steve Webb from Edible Kids Gardens, aimed to give staff from all participating centres ideas on how they can transform their outdoor areas into nature play spaces. It was also an opportunity for staff and family members to take part in a working bee to create a low cost, low tech nature play space. The result was amazing!



Before



After

It may be hard to believe, but this entire project was achieved on a budget of only \$2000, aided by committed volunteers and the use of free or low cost recycled materials. It was funded from fundraising by staff and families of Warilla Child Care Centre and a contribution from Council. GMGC funded the workshop that was open to all centres. To see more photos visit <http://www.facebook.com/gmgc01>

Barrack Heights Community Preschool

Barrack Heights Community Preschool (BHCP) have taken up the Growing Minds Greening Communities challenge and have created lots of fun ways to encourage sustainability based learning, both indoors and outdoors.

Some of their current environmental initiatives include bottling and selling "Super Worm Juice" from their worm farm to families to use as an organic garden fertiliser. They have also been visiting the Barrack Heights Community Garden as a way of teaching the children about the natural environment and growing food including tomatoes, snow peas, beans, lettuce, herbs and some fruit trees.

Additionally, the staff have been using the NSW Early Childhood Environmental Educator's Network (ECEEN) EcoSmart Tool to set goals to improve the sustainability of their centre's operations. They have done this by working through the different sections of the EcoSmart tool at team meetings. Each section addresses a different sustainability topic and prompts the staff to set short, medium and long term goals for making improvements.

Some of the energy ideas they have been flagged in the short term are utilising more natural light, hanging out washing on warm sunny days instead of using the dryer, reducing the temperature of the ducted air-conditioning by a couple of degrees and turning off electrical devices when not in use. Additionally, the children are encouraged to turn off light switches and keep the doors closed when the air conditioning is on.



Resources



Shellharbour Area

Shellharbour City Council's Environment & Waste Teams

Visit <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au> or call 02 4221 6111

Shellharbour Libraries

Albion Park Branch

Russell Street, Albion Park NSW 2527.

Call 02 4256 2001

Monday - 10am to 7pm

Tuesday - 10am to 6pm

Wednesday & Thursday - 10am to 5pm

Saturday - 9am to 12noon

Closed Fridays and Sundays

Oak Flats Branch

Cnr Central Avenue and Fisher Street, Oak Flats NSW 2529. Call 02 4256 3772

Monday - 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm

Tuesday - 1pm to 8pm

Wednesday - 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm

Thursday - 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm

Closed Fridays and Sundays

Shellharbour Village Branch

Wentworth Street, Shellharbour NSW 2529.

Call 02 4295 1178

Tuesday - 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 6pm

Friday - 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm

Saturday - 9am to 12pm

Closed Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays

Warilla

Cnr Lake Entrance and Shellharbour Roads, Warilla NSW 2528. Call 02 4297 2522

Monday to Friday - 10am to 8pm

Saturday - 9am to 12noon

Closed Sundays

Shellharbour City Council Plant Nursery

132 Industrial Road, Oak Flats NSW 2529 (enter via River Oak Place)

Visit <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au> or call 02 4221 6191

Remondis Harbour Cities - Shellharbour

Visit <http://www.shellharbourwaste.com.au/> or call 1300 121 344

Albion Park Men's Shed

253 Tongarra Road, Albion Park NSW 2527

Visit <http://www.apmensshed.org/> or call 0408 553 099

Shellharbour Men's Shed

32 Addison Street, Shellharbour NSW 2529.

Call 02 4297 8005

Barrack Heights Community Garden

Cnr Wattle Road and Carrington St, Barrack Heights NSW 2528

Visit <http://bhcommunitygarden.blogspot.com.au/> or call 02 4221 6170

Albion Park Community Garden

Albion Park Community Centre, Russell Street, Albion Park NSW 2527

Call 02 4257 3342

Landcare & Bushcare Groups

- Oakey Creek Bushcare, Oak Flats. Meets fortnightly on Wednesdays. Contact Council on 02 4221 6111 for details.
- Tullimbah Landcare, Albion Park. Meets at Elizabeth Brownlee Reserve (end of Digby Close), on 2nd Wednesday & 4th Saturday of the month from 9am-1pm. Contact Ruth Jenkins on 02 4256 2684.
- Currumbene Reserve Bushcare, Flinders. Meets fortnightly on Saturday from 9am - 12noon. Contact Council on 02 4221 6111 for details.
- Deakin Reserve Bushcare meets on the 3rd Saturday of the month from 9am-12pm at Deakin Reserve Oak Flats. Locations can change so contact Council on 4221 6111 for more information.
- Blackbutt Bushcare meet at the car park off Blackbutt Way, on the 3rd Sunday of the month from 9am-12 pm. Contact Tony Hepworth on 02 4297 6490 for directions.
- Mt Warrigal Bushcare (Shellharbour Lions Club) meet at the car park at the top of Rowland Ave on the last Saturday of the month at 10am. Contact Council on 4221 6111 for details.

Online



The monthly Sustainable Shellharbour e-newsletter is full of information and inspiration about local sustainability workshops and events, local native plants and animals, tips on what to plant when in your veggie patch and more. To view the latest issue visit <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au> or call 02 4221 6111. Subscribe by emailing sustainability@shellharbour.nsw.gov.au

Remondis Harbour Cities - <http://www.shellharbourwaste.com.au/>

Clean Up Australia - <http://www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/>

Planet Ark - <http://planetark.org/>

Take 3 - <http://www.take3.org.au/>

Sydney Water – www.sydneywater.com.au

Rouse Water - http://www.rouswater.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/default/page.asp?p=DOC-YYA-54-17-57

Nature Play WA - www.natureplaywa.org.au

Edible Kids Gardens - www.ediblekidsgardens.com.au

Frogs of the Illawarra - <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au/filedata/pdf/FrogsoftheIllawarrabrochure.pdf>

Butterflies of the Illawarra - <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au/filedata/pdf/factShButterfliesIllawarra.pdf>

Grow Local Native Garden Guide - <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au/FileData/PDF/GrowLocalIllawarraNativeGardenGuide.pdf>

Building Backyard Biodiversity - <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au/filedata/pdf/BiodiversityBuildingBackyardBiodiversity.pdf>

Illawarra Birders Inc – Illawarra Birds - <http://illawarrabirders.org/brochure.html>

Backyard Buddies - <http://www.backyardbuddies.net.au/>

Australian Museum - <http://australianmuseum.net.au/>

Birds in Backyards - <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/>

World Wildlife Fund - <http://www.wwf.org.au>

National Parks & Wildlife Service - <http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/>

Grow Local Edible Garden Guide - <http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au/FileData/PDF/GrowLocalIllawarraEdibleGardenGuide.pdf>

The Edible Schoolyard - <http://edibleschoolyard.org/>

Early Childhood Environmental Educators Network - www.eceen.org.au

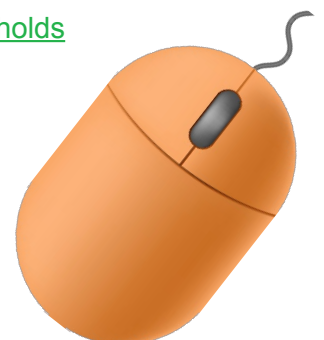
Little Green Steps resource kit – <http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/Environment/Education-Community-Projects/Sustainable-Childrens-Centres>

The Office of Environment & Heritage - <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/households>

Cool Australia - <http://www.coolaustralia.org>

Early Childhood Victoria - <http://www.earlychildhoodvictoria.org.au/>

Kidsafe - <http://www.kidsafensw.org/>



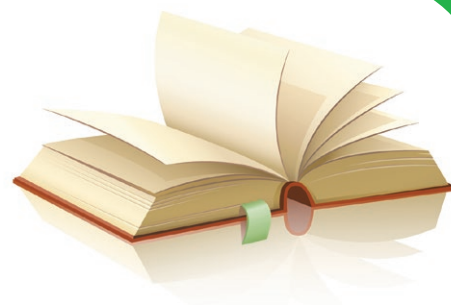
Book titles available from Shellharbour City Libraries

Educator Resources

- *Cultivating Outdoor Classrooms* by Eric Nelson
- *Early Childhood Activities for a Greener Earth* by Patty Born Selly
- *Effective Practice in Outdoor Learning* by Terry Gould
- *Forest School and Outdoor Learning in the Early Years* by Sara Knight
- *The book of gardening projects for kids* by Whitney Cohen
- *Yates Young Gardener - get your hands dirty* by Janice Marriot
- *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv
- *The Nature Principle* by Richard Louv
- *Nurture through nature* by Claire Warden
- *Fascination of fire - charcoal* by Claire Warden
- *The potential of a puddle* by Claire Warden
- *Fascination of water* by Claire Warden
- *Fascination of Earth* by Claire Warden
- *Hey Kids, out the door, let's explore* by Rhoda Redleaf
- *Young children and the environment* by Julie Davis
- *Every nursery needs a garden* by Ann Watts
- *Making the most of reclaimed and natural materials* by Linda Thornton
- *The Little book of Seasons* by Pat Brunton
- *The little book of living things* by Pat Brunton
- *The little book of treasure boxes* by Pat Brunton
- *Making the most of outdoor learning* by Linda Thornton

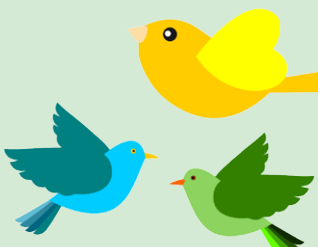
Children's Books

- *Last Tree in the City* by Peter Carnavas
- *Michael Recycle* by Ellie Bethel
- *Michael Recycle and Bootleg Peg* by Ellie Bethel
- *Compost Stew* by Mary Mckenna Siddle
- *Kyle in his compost pile* by Julie Lehman
- *Caillou - The magic of compost* by Sarah Margaret Johanson
- *Caillou - Every drop counts* by Sarah Margaret Johanson
- *Caillou - As good as new* by Sarah Margaret Johanson
- *Caillou - plants a tree* by Sarah Margaret Johanson
- *George saves the world by lunchtime* by Jo Readman
- *The world came to my place today* by Jo Readman
- *Grandpa's Garden* by Stella Fry
- *Grandpa Green* by Lane Smith
- *Grandpa, why are you planting that tree?* by Ted Hoagland
- *E is for Environment* by Ian Corlett
- *Big Earth Little Me* by Thom Wiley
- *Big Bear Hug* by Nicolas Odland
- *Don't throw that away* by Lara Bergen
- *I can save the earth* by Alison Inches
- *If rocks could sing* by Leslie McGuirk
- *One World* by Michael Foreman
- *Peppa Pig* by Recycling Fun
- *The Little Raindrop* by Joanna Gray



Green Dates



January National Bird Day 	February World Wetlands Day	March National Sea Week Clean Up Australia Day Parks Week World Water Day World Weather Day Earth Hour
April Earth Day 	May International Composting Awareness Week World Migratory Bird Day International Biodiversity Day World Turtle Day	June World Environment Day World Oceans Day Global Wind Day
July NAIDOC Week World Population Day National Tree Day 	August International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples Keep Australia Beautiful Week	September Biodiversity Month National Wattle Day National Land Care Week National Threatened Species Day Sustainable House Day National Bilby Day Save the Koala Day World Water Monitoring Day World Car-Free Day
October Energy Awareness Month Walk to School Day Ride to Work Day National Organic Week World Animal Day World Habitat Day World Food Day National Water Week	November National Recycling Week	December Coast Care Week 