

# Nothing else lasts forever!

## ...but natural playgrounds will, if you treat them right!

When we lecture about or discuss Natural Playgrounds, the one question we always get? "What about maintenance?" - asked in a challenging manner, and as though nothing else requires it....

...and as though that question should stop us in our tracks, make us reconsider this foolish idea of bringing nature closer to children so they'll get healthier, be more well-adjusted, be happier, be able to learn more, be good stewards of the earth.

I don't know if people asking really want to know the answer, so they can plan long range, or if they're looking for ways to derail others from pursuing this "foolishness."

"What's the difference?" I want to say. "If you think it's best for your children, as all the research suggests, then it doesn't matter, does it? Because if it's that important (and it is!), you'll find a way to take care of it!"

Instead we patiently explain that Natural Playgrounds are living, breathing things. They're natural environments, and like your garden at home, they need looking after.

We explain that they're not another fad. They're not the latest catalogue item. They're not something you buy and forget, like playgrounds out of a catalogue, which (by the way!) require lots of maintenance, and which (by the way!) need to be replaced every 15 years at great cost.

We don't know how to make the expense of catalog playgrounds more clear. Spend \$150,000 today on one, and every 15 years thereafter like clockwork, spend another \$150,000, so it's really \$10,000 a year every year forever! Not to mention the ongoing maintenance of replacing a massive amount of woodchips every year, and replacing hooks, and hinges, and other things that wear out.

And all for what? A sterile play area that looks bleak, isn't beautiful, offers no on-going challenge, offers no potential for discovery, is inherently boring (ask the kids!), and inherently unsafe (look at the statistics!).

So sure, Natural Playgrounds require maintenance like everything else -- but the maintenance is different, and it requires an attitude that's different, as well, from the administration, from the teachers, from the parents, and from the children.

This is their garden. This is their piece of the earth. This is their corner of the world. This is theirs to take care of (and yours, too), so spend time learning about caring for living things so you can teach them how to do it, too. Let them learn what it takes to help grass survive. Let them figure out why the grass looks brown, or why it got green again

when it warmed up. Let them discover that weeds are welcome, that dirt stores food for plants, and how flowers drink water.

That's what makes Natural Playgrounds fun! That's what makes them unique. That's what gives them character, and depth, and intrigue, and challenge. And that's what makes them worth maintaining.

And like we said before, hills and valleys and rock climbing walls and gardens and boulders and orchards and trees and huge sand play areas last forever. You never have to replace them!

You just need to care for them.

And they won't cost you \$10,000 a year forever, like the ones from catalogues.

