**Purpose**

Designed to complement the science curriculum at the Children’s Center at USC, the Nature Classroom is a wonderful schoolyard habitat available to preschoolers for their enjoyment, guided observation, investigation, and learning related to many aspects of the natural environment.

The Nature Classroom was created to stimulate children’s minds and bodies by providing opportunities to walk, run, explore, observe and talk about what they may find in this enhanced outdoor setting. These first-hand experiences can spark their curiosity and introduce natural sciences through outdoor adventures that instill a lasting appreciation for the wonders of nature.

**Friends of the Children’s Center at USC**

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**Volunteer labor from:** friends, Master Gardeners, parents, and USC students

Contributions to support ongoing development can be made to USC Educational Foundation, Children’s Center Nature Classroom.

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**About the Site**
The 1/4 acre Nature Classroom lies adjacent to the Children’s Center playground, with convenient access to excursions for fun and observation. The hillside, triangular-shaped, fenced-in site is bounded by the Center playground, Rocky Branch Creek to the west and railroad tracks to the south. It is characterized by several micro zones with different sets of environmental factors such as sun exposure, soil moisture, soil types and slope.

**About the Landscaping**
The site was landscaped as a child-friendly place for learning about science and nature. Taking advantage of the site’s natural attributes, a meadow, a wooded area and a bog area were established where different families of plants can flourish. Structural features were added especially to create visual interest, a sense of fun, and activity for children: a rocky dry stream bed, a bridge, a stepped path, an arbor, and two gathering areas, where the children and their teachers can stop and talk about what they have seen.

Hundreds of trees, shrubs and colorful perennials were planted to create diverse vegetation for children to observe. Plants were chosen to attract birds and butterflies, provide seasonal variation, and to exhibit notable differences in size, color, shape and form.

**What Children Will Learn**
The children can conduct developmentally-appropriate research and observation on topics such as weather, plant and small animal habitats, and plant types. The proximity of the site to the classrooms will facilitate observations over time of seasonal changes and life cycles.

From lessons and experiences here the children can think about and respond to questions such as, “what do plants need to grow?” or “where could a toad live here?” or “what can birds find to eat here?” Classroom activities can follow outings, in which the children communicate their impressions of the natural world through creative writing and drawing; describing colors, sounds, textures, and smells; reading and telling stories; or using mathematical symbols and skills such as measuring, comparing and recording observations.

**Long Lasting Benefits**
The Nature Classroom is a very special educational resource where children can learn invaluable lessons about the rhythms of nature and the wonders of the environment from their enhanced science curriculum and early experiences as preschoolers here. Over the years ahead, the outdoor classroom will be an enduring resource, allowing hundreds of children, USC education majors, teachers, and faculty to continue to benefit from the learning and teaching opportunities in environmental and natural sciences.