

# Exterior Decorating: It's A Natural

## Understanding the Impact of Beautification

### Objectives

Students will be able understand how beautification can benefit the environment, reduce litter, and create enjoyable green spaces.

### Web-Directed Research

These activities correlate with the Keep America Beautiful "Clean Sweep U.S.A." web site ([www.kab.org/cleansweepusa](http://www.kab.org/cleansweepusa)) targeting grades 5-8, and are designed to expand on the objectives in this lesson.

1. Find out if your community has a beautification or city greening program. Is your city a Keep America Beautiful affiliate? Look it up at [www.kab.org](http://www.kab.org). And, is there a nature center near you? Can you locate a Master Gardener in your community?
2. Determine whether your city is a "Tree City". What are the requirements to be a Tree City?
3. Find out what wildflowers and trees are native to your region or state. What is the advantage of using native trees and flowers?
4. Work with American Forests CITYgreen environmental education program to understand how your city can save energy by increasing its tree cover. How do trees help save energy?
5. Get planting and care instructions for creating a container garden. What plants and flowers work best? What types of containers are available?
6. How does beautification reduce litter?

### Web sites to consult:

- America the Beautiful ([www.america-the-beautiful.org](http://www.america-the-beautiful.org)); get free seeds
- American Forests ([www.americanforests.org](http://www.americanforests.org)); learn how to plant a tree, get CITYgreen environmental education, complete the personal climate change calculator, and check out their Trees Across America campaign
- American Horticultural Society ([www.ahs.org/master\\_gardeners/index.htm](http://www.ahs.org/master_gardeners/index.htm)); locate a master gardener
- Arbor Day Foundation ([www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org)); take a quiz on the right tree in the right place ([www.arborday.org/trees/righttreeandplace/](http://www.arborday.org/trees/righttreeandplace/)) and find out if your city is a "Tree City" ([www.arborday.org/programs/treeCityUSA.cfm](http://www.arborday.org/programs/treeCityUSA.cfm))
- Audubon Nature Centers ([www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)); locate a nature center by state
- The Gardener's Network ([www.gardenersnet.com/bulbs/](http://www.gardenersnet.com/bulbs/)); how to grow tulips, daffodils and other flowering bulbs
- Keep America Beautiful's Youth Take Action ([www.kab.org/youthtakeaction](http://www.kab.org/youthtakeaction)); organize a youth-led green-up
- Kids Gardening ([www.kidsgardening.com/growingideas/projects/feb03/pg1.html](http://www.kidsgardening.com/growingideas/projects/feb03/pg1.html))
- Lady Bird Johnson Wild Flower Research Center ([www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org))

## In-Class Activity

### Method

Students will learn the value of beautification to their school and community by understanding its environmental benefits and its impact on reducing littering.

### Vocabulary

Beautification, beautify, green space, landscape, maintenance

### Materials

Bagged soil mix, container (window box, hanging basket, pot, barrel, or other planting container; make sure container has drainage holes in the bottom, and consider a recycled or reused container), container plants (small tree or flowers), gloves (may be disposable), shovel or small spade, trash bags, watering can or water source, wheelbarrow

### Procedure

*Background:*

BEAUTIFICATION is making visual improvements to an area. Pruning and planting trees and flowers, landscaping, graffiti abatement, and cleanups are all beautification initiatives that have an immediate positive effect on a neighborhood. Beautification creates spaces where people want to be and in which they can take pride.

Beautifying with trees and other greenery, flowers and landscaping provides a natural haven in urban areas. Besides creating beauty, trees and flowers provide important environmental benefits.

Trees naturally clean and protect the environment:

- Pump out oxygen
- Remove pollution from the air
- Provide shelter to wildlife
- Slow storm water runoff
- Prevent soil erosion
- Reduce noise
- Save energy (providing cooling shade and reduce air conditioning costs)

Native wildflowers:

- Reduce maintenance costs
- Are highly resistant to drought
- Attract a diverse wild life—insects, birds, and other animals

Other flowering bulbs and plants:

- Produce breathable oxygen helping to clean the air
- Help to purify water and prevent soil erosion; foliage buffers the impact of rain as it falls to the earth

### Procedures

1. Introduce the term BEAUTIFY (and BEAUTIFICATION) as it relates to outdoor spaces. Ask students to think of ways to beautify an area. For example, pick up litter, plant flower or trees, paint a mural on a wall, or paint over graffiti. Point out that people litter less frequently

in public spaces that are well kept and contain natural beauty. Have students discuss how beautification can prevent littering. Ask them to recall specific examples of local areas that have been “beautified”. How do these GREEN SPACES make them feel? How do they want people to treat these places?

2. Using the background information above, discuss the benefits and beauty of trees, flowers, and other plants. What is their impact on the environment? What benefits do trees give to you and the environment? Who takes care of the trees, flowers, and lawns on your school grounds? What do plants need to thrive? (e.g., sunshine, water, soil, space, nutrients, etc.) Do you have a responsibility to care for green spaces?
3. Have students team up and take a quick “beautification assessment” of their school (have an adult or teacher accompany the students). How many trees are on school grounds? What kinds of trees? Are there flowers, shrubs, or bushes? What types of flowers? When are they in bloom? Are there grass areas? Why were these trees, flowers, and other plants chosen? What is the square footage of green space vs. asphalt, brick, or cement? Are there green spaces for students to enjoy? Who is responsible for school LANDSCAPE and MAINTENANCE? What might be the challenges to maintaining a green space (e.g., watering, improper soil, leaf clean up, insects, etc.)?
4. As a class, identify an area on school grounds that need beautification. If necessary, first clean up the area. Then assemble one or more containers with plants or flowers, or even a small tree. Add these to the area to create beauty and school pride. Containers could be added to a courtyard, in front of the school, outside the classroom door, or other area students determine would be improved with “beautification”. Obtain any permission necessary and consider partnering with landscaping or maintenance staff.
5. Determine what to plant. In choosing plants, have students discuss growing season, annual or perennial, color, height, sun requirements, and maintenance requirements (e.g., watering). Consider native wildflowers and the benefits of native plants (e.g., they are often hardier and require no daily watering or other special care). Establish simple requirements for what to plant, for example, plants that require full sun, no daily watering, plants that won't outgrow the container, flower color, etc. Contact local nurseries, landscape companies, or extension service for advice and materials (also see “Web Resources”).
6. Gather materials and start planting. When planting, be sure to put the container in a spot where it can drain. Follow tree/flower planting and care instructions. You can start with seeds, but annuals, bulbs, or small container plants may be best. Maintain the site and keep it and the area around it litter free. Students may also want to prepare labels for each of the plants to identify them.

### **Assessment**

- Have students define “beautification” and explain its benefits to their school and community. Students should also be able to explain the value of trees and flowers to the environment.

### **Enrichment**

- Invite school staff responsible for landscape and up-keep to discuss with the class care and maintenance of school green spaces, and maintenance challenges. Have students prepare specific questions based on their “beautification assessment” of the school grounds.

- Use Keep America Beautiful's "Youth Take Action" poster (also online at [www.kab.org/takeaction](http://www.kab.org/takeaction)) to plan a beautification project.
- Have an urban forester or local Master Gardener come to the class to help students determine what and where to plant trees/flowers, as well as their value to the environment.