



Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Chicago Public Schools

Project Team: Clauss Brothers, Inc.; Corinne Peterson; Elliot Construction; Midwest Groundcovers; Openlands

Bringing the Classroom Outdoors - Evergreen Academy

CULLITON QUINN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Students Help Transform Asphalt and Concrete into Learning Garden

Under the guidance of a nonprofit greening organization, Evergreen Academy Middle School prepared an education-based program to redevelop their limited outdoor space. The design team collaborated with the McKinley Park neighborhood school's science classes to transform the concrete and asphalt space into an interactive learning garden.

The main classroom area is sited away from the public street to minimize distractions. Additional seating arrangements allow students to work in smaller groups or independently. Grassy mounds serve as a stage to act out imaginary stories; a stoic snow-dusted art form; or a place to just lie back and watch the clouds pass. Narrow raised garden planters accommodate physically impaired and able-bodied students alike.

A significant lack of trees on the site meant that, when in use, there was little to no protection from the elements.

Two Swamp White Oaks and a Locust tree were introduced to provide the overhead canopy and impart a sense of enclosure to the landscape; and Upright English Oak trees will grow into a dense screen from the alley. Ornamental grasses and a variety of sedges were strewn throughout the planting beds, installed by the students, and Upright Switch Grass was introduced for buffering the garages along the neighboring alley. Students and neighborhood volunteers maintain the space, periodically removing aggressive weeds from taking over the garden.

The landscape has ongoing seasonal and educational interests. Vibrant mosaics, crafted by the students and designed by a local art group, adorn the concrete seat walls. Ornamental grasses and sedges turn from their summer green into golden winter tones; a beautiful contrast to the strong bold lines of the concrete benches and striking birch bark. Offering opportunities to touch different plants; smell herbs and flowers; and listen to the sounds of the grasses and rustling leaves; the garden is full of teaching moments that will invigorate students year after year.

