



Conservation in the Classroom

A Newsletter for Lucas County Educators to learn the latest in Conservation Education

JANUARY
FEBRUARY
2026



A Note from Patrick

Happy New Year!



I can't believe that the school year is already halfway over! I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season. A big thank you to those who have invited Lucas SWCD into your classrooms to foster an appreciation for our valuable natural resources.

I will soon start setting up program requests for the 2026-2027 School Year. Like in years past, I will provide some tentative dates to hold and will reach back out in the fall to confirm dates/times and make any necessary adjustments.

Inside this newsletter, there is a wealth of professional development opportunities and resources! Be sure to check out all of the information and let me know if you have any further questions.

Take Care!

Patrick Troyer

School Tree Donation Program

In honor of Earth Day and Arbor Day, Lucas County students have the opportunity to receive a Norway Spruce seedling , **free of charge**, compliments of Lucas Soil & Water Conservation District! As part of this program, students receive a seedling prepackaged with instructions on how to care for their seedling along with a fun program where they learn all about the needs of trees. If you would rather do a class tree planted at the school, we can do that too!

Supplies are limited with the tree seedlings. To reserve your trees, please contact me via phone at 419-893-1966 ext. 2# or email ptroyer@co.lucas.oh.us by **Friday, March 20, 2026 at 3pm.**

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To Schedule an Education Program:

Patrick Troyer, Education Specialist
Phone: 419-893-1966 Ext. 2#
Email: ptroyer@co.lucas.oh.us

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO STAY UP TO DATE! @LUCASSWCD

Professional Development Opportunities

EDUCATOR WORKSHOP

Save the Date!
July 14 - 16, 2026

Sauder Village
Archbold, OH

Earn Contact Hours or Grad Credit!

Hotel rooms at the Sauder Heritage Inn and also camp sites will be available to reserve if you choose to stay during the workshop. Details to follow!

Help all ages get their hands on nature!

Exciting field trips and tours for your classroom including Nature Fresh Farms, Andre Compost, and more!

Join us as we explore activities that can be used with a variety of audiences both indoors and outdoors!

Stay tuned for more details!
www.lucasswcd.org/edworkshops

Save the Date for the 2026 edition of the Get Out, Get Going, Go Teach Educator Workshop! We have many fantastic tours in the works along with fantastic lessons/resources to bring environmental education alive in your classroom!

Registration will come out in early spring with opportunities for an “Early Bird Discount”. Professional Development Credits will be available!

Participants will have the option to stay at the Inn at Sauder Village!

Growing Teachers Throughout the Season (GTS)

The goal of Growing Teachers Throughout the Season (GTS) is to increase the number of pre-K through grade 12 educational professionals who teach STEM-based agricultural production techniques and workforce skills throughout the traditional school year by using the GTS curriculum. GTS is applicable at all grade levels, including early care and education, for teachers of all subjects, in a range of settings including classrooms, libraries, and garden clubs. Growing Teachers Throughout the Seasons is data-driven and teacher informed.

The GTS school year growing cycle makes it possible to harvest a different food each month—September through May! No watering or maintenance is required during winter, spring, or summer breaks! These free online modules with videos and other resources will support your school garden efforts. The online modules supplement the GTS Guidebook.

What You'll Learn

- Outline the GTS growing cycle and various growing methods
- Discover how to effectively support and sustain your school garden
- Learn the fundamentals of seed starting and LED lighting systems
- Gain insights into raised bed gardening and season extension techniques
- Explore hydroponic growing systems and their practical applications in schools
- Access additional curated resources and materials to support year-round growing in your GTS program

Course Fee: \$10

[Course Registration Link](#)



Professional Development Opportunities



Annual Teacher In-service & Resource Fair

March 3, 2026 3:30pm - 5:30pm
 ESC Lake Erie West Office



Join Lucas SWCD and The Educational Service Center of Lake Erie-West for our annual FREE Teacher In-service and Resource Fair! You will have the opportunity to interact with local organizations to hear what resources they can offer your classroom. You will also hear from the featured speaker, Sara Mierzwiak, from The University of Toledo, who will discuss the GLOBE Citizen Science Program and provide resources and activities available through this program. Register using the following link: [Resource Fair Registration](#)

2026 Water Quality Stewardship Certification Program

The Lucas County Environmental Education Committee is pleased to announce the creation of the Water Quality Stewardship Certification Program! The goal of this program is to provide participants with the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about improving the health of our local waterways.

Hear from a variety of experts that will provide valuable insight on the issues facing our watersheds and how you play an important part to help make a difference.

Keep your eyes out for registration details coming soon!

WATER QUALITY STEWARDSHIP CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Have you noticed water quality issues in your community but aren't sure how to respond? Or are you interested in learning more about the health and recreation opportunities available on our local waterways? If so, this program is for you!

<p><i>Introduction to Watersheds</i> June 4, 2026 5:30pm to 7:30pm</p> <p><i>Paddle & Learn</i> June 11, 2026 5:30pm to 7:30pm</p> <p><i>Marine Debris</i> June 18, 2026 5:30pm to 7:30pm</p> <p><i>Something's Fishy</i> June 25, 2026 5:30pm to 7:30pm</p> <p><i>Putting It All Together</i> July 9, 2026 5:30pm to 7:30pm</p>	<p>Participants will receive certification at the final class.</p> <p>All 5 classes must be attended to receive certification</p>
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Stay tuned for more details!

www.lucasswcd.org

Program Highlight of the Month: Invaders

INVADERS!

What would you do if someone came to your house, took over, and refused to leave? This program introduces students to invasive species—both plants and animals—by exploring what they are, how they spread between ecosystems, and the harm they can cause to native species that have been part of that ecosystem for generations. In this interactive, full-body "musical chairs"-style game, students will simulate competition for habitat and resources. This hands-on activity gives students an engaging way to explore the complex relationships between native and invasive species. By physically simulating the competition for resources, students will experience the impact of invasive species on habitat and resource availability, especially in ecosystems made more vulnerable by pollutants.

Academic Standard: 5.LS.1 Organisms perform a variety of roles in an ecosystem.

Academic Standard: 5.LS.2 All of the processes that take place within organisms require energy.

Academic Standard: Geography Strand-Human Systems #7: The variety of physical environments within the Western Hemisphere influences human activities. Likewise, human activities modify the physical environments.

Estimated Time: 35 Minutes



Grant Corner: Highlighting Grants of Interests For Local Educators

National Environmental Ed Foundation

General Info: NEEF administers grant programs that support environmental education and community-based environmental work across the United States. Through partnerships with funders and community organizations, we help bring learning, stewardship, and engagement opportunities to communities nationwide.

Our grant programs support projects that connect people to learning and public lands through hands-on environmental action. This work expands participation, strengthens community connections, and supports positive outcomes for both people and the environment.

Eligible Applicants: All US K-12 Public Schools

For More Info/Apply: Visit the [NEEF Website](#)

Science Education Council of Ohio

General Info: The SECO Membership Grant is designed to provide science teachers support in their curriculum. SECO Membership Grants do require membership in the Science Education Council of Ohio. Grants are awarded up to \$500.

Eligibility: It is available to pre-K-12 teachers under the assumption they will be willing to present at a SECO conference within 2 years of receiving the grant.

For More Info/Apply: Visit the [Science Education Council Website](#)

Fun Fact of the Month

Animals in Winter

- Groundhogs (aka woodchucks) hibernate and prepare for winter by making underground dens and eating a lot.
- Some ladybugs hibernate in large groups in places such as logs, leaf piles, rocks, and even human homes!
- Squirrels do not hibernate but do sleep more in the winter. They prepare by finding and storing nuts, berries, and seeds.
- During hibernation, animals are not sleeping, but rather become inactive to save energy. Their heart rates and breathing slows and they can lose up to ½ their body weight!



Resource Connections

Sign-up today!

Area 1 Envirothon

April 22, 2026

Williams Co. Conservation League
Montpelier, Ohio

The Envirothon is a competitive outdoor academic team event testing knowledge of aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, and a current environmental issue.



Lucas SWCD will pay the \$50 registration for the first ten (10) teams from Lucas County!

Registrations due March 25, 2026

Open to students in grades 9-12

Contact us to learn more!

Patrick Troyer, Education Specialist
Email: ptroyer@co.lucas.oh.us
Phone: 419-893-1966 Ext. 2#
www.area1envirothon.com

Save the Date

ENVIROTHON COMPETITION TEACHER WORKSHOP

Details

What to Expect:

Join environmental professionals this summer for a two-day professional development workshop designed to prepare educators for the Envirothon competition.

Participants will receive hands-on training in the four Envirothon contest areas: Aquatic Ecology, Forestry, Soils, Wildlife

Teachers/team advisors will receive resources and training to support establishing an Envirothon team at their school/youth organization. 1 semester hour of graduate credit through Ashland University available.

About the Envirothon:

The Envirothon is a hands-on competition for high school students. This workshop is ideal for educators working with students in grades 9-12 interested in environmental education and outdoor learning.

Location:

Farm Science Review
Molly Caren Agricultural Center
135 OH-38, London, OH 43140



**THUR. & FRI.
JUNE 4 & 5
9-3:30 P.M.**

Hosted by the Ohio Federation of Soil & Water Conservation Districts
Additional information at ofswcd.org/envirothon



FEB 2 - 13, 2026
OUTDOOR LEARNING

WINTER CHALLENGE

Outdoor learning can happen every day, in every season! Sign up for the winter challenge to join in on the fun and win some amazing prizes!



Take your students outside between February 2 and February 13 and share a photo on #TMOWinterChallenge or upload your photo at takemeoutside.ca/winterchallenge



Penny's Ponderings:

Nature in the School Yard

Have you and your students ever wondered what other living things might also use your school's property? Or, maybe you've never given it any thought. On the other hand, maybe you've wondered but just assumed that because your school is in the middle of a city, no other non-human animals share the space?

As I look out my winter window and see deer, woodpeckers, cats, juncos, cardinals, and other wildlife, I began to think about animal life, not just here, but also on school grounds. How students can, whether in urban, suburban, or rural schools, become more familiar with animals (including insects) that share our space. This is often where my brain goes when thinking of wildlife... how to impart to students a better understanding of and respect for these animals. And, I believe, one of the first places to start is to recognize that many exist in places where they are often rarely seen.



So, the following is going to be a rather non-technical way to help students develop a better understanding of the animals that share our spaces.

There are many layers to this learning experience, starting with physically sighting the animal to noticing signs that the animal was there. In the age of cell phones and computers the simple experience of walking or sitting quietly outside is often missed. So, let's start with taking a simple stroll outside to notice the signs. No matter the age of the student, the simple act of going outside and quietly listening is a great starting point. Do they hear birds in a tree or nearby shrubs? Is there a cricket chirping next to a building? What about the unique sound of cicadas? Can they put their ear next to boxwood leaves and hear chewing sounds (made by leaf miners)? Compare different times of day if you can. Are the sounds different? For example, maybe croaking and peeping frogs are living in a near-by ditch or long-standing puddle but can only be heard in the morning.



Next, let's use our eyes to notice signs of life. First, ask them to stand back and look at a tree from a distance. What is its shape? Is there anything in its branches? A small nest might indicate a bird while a large nest could be a squirrel's home. What about a hornet's nest? Though these are more easily seen after leaf drop, they can also be seen during the summer. Does the trunk have a large hole in it where an animal might live? Look down where the roots meet the ground. Are there any gaps where a burrowing animal might live? Is there any scat at the bottom of the tree? Could the scat be from birds, bats, or the dreaded Lanternfly?



Get closer and look up into the branches from below. Sometimes one can see nests that were not visible from far away. Touch the bark. Is it smooth or craggy? Are there any holes in the bark that might indicate insects live there or certain types of birds were feeding from these insects. If it's craggy, are there any webs between the bark's ridges? Could these be spider webs, caterpillar webs, or from some other insect? Kneel or squat on the ground. What do you notice? Are there ant hills or small round holes, or burrows you didn't see earlier? If the school does not have trees, students should be able to do this or something similar, on a smaller scale, with large shrubs.

Don't forget to take advantage of the ability to touch and smell your surroundings. For example, sometimes it is hard to walk by a plant without feeling the fuzzy leaves or brushing your hands over a flower or rubbing your fingers along the stem of a plant because that is part of the enjoyment. Then pick a leaf and squish it between your fingers and give it a whiff; scrape some bark off a stick and take a little whiff; and of course, stop and smell the flowers. However, a quick note of caution; first ensure the plants are not toxic or won't cause a rash!

There is so much more that can be done to notice nature in the school yard. Use your imagination. Observe; ask questions; and most of all... enjoy!

Penny Bollin
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Urban Conservation Technician
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Activity of the Month:

Elephant Toothpaste

Active Time < 10 minutes

Total Project Time < 10 minutes

Key Concepts

Chemical reactions

Credits

Ben Finio, PhD, Science Buddies
Svenja Lohner, PhD, Science Buddies



Introduction

Create a giant foaming reaction and wow your friends with this classic science demonstration! With just a few simple ingredients, you can make something that looks like toothpaste being squeezed from a tube—but so big, it must be for elephants!

Materials

- Empty plastic bottle
- Dry yeast
- Warm water
- Liquid dish soap
- Liquid food coloring
- 3% hydrogen peroxide.
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Safety glasses
- Large tub or tray to catch the foam, or outdoor location to do the experiment

Prep Work

- Wear safety glasses to do this experiment, since hydrogen peroxide can irritate your eyes.
- The elephant toothpaste will bubble up out of the bottle. Do the experiment in a tray or tub (or outside) so it is easy to clean up all the foam.

Instructions

- Pour 1/2 cup of hydrogen peroxide into the bottle.
- Add a big squirt of dish soap into the bottle, and swirl gently to mix.
- If you want to make your foam a single color, add a few drops of food coloring directly into the hydrogen peroxide, and swirl the bottle gently to mix. If you want to give your foam stripes like some toothpastes, put the drops along the inside rim of the bottle's mouth. Let them drip down the inside of the bottle, but do not mix.
- In a measuring cup, mix together 1 tablespoon of yeast and 3 tablespoons of warm water. Stir for about 30 seconds.



Image Credit: Ben Finio, Science Buddies / Science Buddies