

## Natural Playgrounds: Best Choice in a Tight Economy

*Safe, sustainable, and more challenging Natural Playgrounds cost less than traditional playground equipment and are catching the eye of childcare centers, elementary and Montessori schools, and communities wanting to save money in this tight economy.*

**Dec. 30, 2008** - [PRLog](#) -- Concord, NH. The Natural Playgrounds Company says it can save communities, schools, and childcare centers lots of money by creating sustainable, Natural Playgrounds that are safer and meet green standards, yet challenge kids emotionally, physically, and mentally.

“For the past 60 years, everyone, including bottom-liners, has relied on playground equipment companies providing answers to questions about play and children,” says Ron King, President of the Concord, NH-based Natural Playgrounds Company.

“When a playground needed refurbishing, or a new playground was needed, decision-makers turned to playground equipment companies to give them the most up-to-date playground equipment that met the newest safety standards,” said King.

“Then every ten years or so, when that equipment became outdated, out-of-code, and out of compliance, it was dumped in the trash and replaced without a thought, sometimes at great sacrifice to other, more pressing program needs, and certainly at great cost to the environment.”

Now that’s changing, and changing fast, and people relying on that old thinking are losing out big time, because now, today, things are different.

King says that for one thing, kids have never liked equipment. “Kids keep telling us (and we’ve interviewed over 5000) that they get bored trying to play on equipment, and would rather do more fun things like dig in the sand, climb trees, make forts, play in the tall grass, or look for bugs.”

The cost for this kind of play, says King, is low.

“Second, when kids get bored, they start using equipment in ways for which it was not designed, and that causes accidents, some of which result in deaths.”

In 2000, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons reported that the annual cost to the US of the over 560,000 equipment-related accidents on playgrounds -- some resulting in deaths -- is over \$8.4 billion every year in medical, legal and liability, pain and suffering, and work loss expenses.

“Third,” says King, “is that the cost of equipment is very high, especially in relation to its play value,” (the kind and amount of play per child, per dollar). “It has always been costly, but now that the price of oil is a daily, global issue, prices for play components with a petrochemical base will continue to soar even more.”

King says that the fourth reason why decision-makers are changing their thinking about playgrounds, is that the environmental impact of manufacturing, shipping, and then trashing playground equipment every ten years is very high.

This is now being referred to as a “carbon footprint” -- the total carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted during production, shipping, use, and disposal. With dwindling world resources, continuing ozone depletion, and ever-rising oil prices, King says that lowering the carbon footprint has become a passionate

goal for child care centers, schools, and governments throughout the US.

Fifth, equipment-based playgrounds are not sustainable, and are therefore environmentally costly.

“Manufacturing playground equipment causes more rapid consumption of the Earth’s limited natural resources than can be replaced by nature,” says King. “This is why there is now a worldwide movement to keep human use of natural resources at a level that can be sustained by nature.”

“There is one other, very persuasive argument we use that convinces money people to re-think their old ideas about equipment-based playgrounds,” says King.

“There is now an overwhelming body of research showing a direct link between exposure to nature and the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of children. This also means that children are sick less often when exposed to nature, which lessens the overall costs to families associated with children being sick.”

King finds that committee and Board members entrusted with decisions affecting child care and school budgets are now realizing they need to find an alternative to the high monetary, environmental, and health costs of a traditional, manufactured, high-tech playground.

That alternative is a Natural Playground. According to King, whose firm has focused on the design and construction of natural playgrounds for 9 years,

- \* Natural playgrounds are designed to expose children to the beauty and wonder of nature while challenging them physically and mentally.
- \* Natural playgrounds are sustainable because they use natural resources in their basic form, and do not require components that are not easily replaced by nature.
- \* Natural playgrounds have a low carbon footprint, as materials used for them are not manufactured and are generally available locally.
- \* Natural Playgrounds provide 3½ times more play items at very high play values for the same dollars spent. For example, a 20,000 square foot Natural Playground efficiently utilizing all of its square footage cost \$50,000 for 70 high play value elements. This cost is compared to one piece of equipment also costing \$50,000 but only having 21 items at very low play value and utilizing only 2,500 square feet.

The Natural Playgrounds Company found that for the same price, the equipment playground had

- \* 3½ times fewer play items,
- \* Significantly lower play value,
- \* high carbon footprint, and
- \* used only 13% of the available land area, was
- \* totally non-sustainable, and
- \* offered no health benefits of nature.

The company has been convincing in its argument that this is a very costly approach.

Other, side benefits of a lower tech, Natural Playground approach include

- \* higher enrollment and longer waiting lists,
- \* inexpensive solutions to drainage issues,
- \* increased wildlife habitats,
- \* indigenous landscaping,
- \* greening of school grounds,
- \* beautification of the property and the neighborhood
- \* age appropriate play

- \* safer play
- \* more, fun options for children of all ages
- \* timelessness

“Making the decision to go with a Natural Playground is financially sound and very cost-effective, and improves your bottom line in many ways,” says King.

“There is really no other way.”

The Natural Playgrounds Company and the Natural Playgrounds Construction Company are both headquartered in Concord, NH, and work all over the US. They can be reached through the web at [www.naturalplaygrounds.com](http://www.naturalplaygrounds.com), by email at [ron@naturalplaygrounds.com](mailto:ron@naturalplaygrounds.com), or by toll free phone 888-290-8405.

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The Natural Playgrounds Company, LLC is the leading US expert in the design & construction of sustainable, equipment-free natural playgrounds, natural playground elements, and outdoor classrooms, for K-12 schools, communities, and childcare centers.

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