

# Natural Environment for Balanced Living

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C. W. MATTISON

*Using nature's resources as a background for school and home life is something that seems to have escaped the attention of many school and home planners. Pointing out that it is just as easy to locate in a fertile setting as in one which is barren, C. W. Mattison, forestry education consultant, Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., proposes that more consideration be given to providing a natural healthy environment so essential to well-rounded living.*

**BALANCED LIVING**—good living. They are synonymous in any land, in any community, in any family. Physical environment—the natural resources upon which all life depends—is basic to balanced living whether it be for the adult or the child. Care and wise use of these resources help maintain the good life. Exploitation and waste destroy it.

One's whole life is influenced by his childhood experiences. Therefore, a healthy environment—good water, rich and stable soil, productive forests—will have its effect upon both the mental and physical development of the child. With it come comfortable homes, good schools, full employment, adequate recreation, and good living in general.

## A Good Location Pays

In providing this healthy environment for our children, let's first consider the school. The mere location of the school itself may mean the difference between the "balanced" and "unbalanced" life. Will the child really enjoy learning in a school located on an eroded hillside? Will the teacher give her best even though the school may be the last thing in modern construction and facilities? Would it not be well to give careful thought to the *location* of

the school as well as to its architectural design? In almost any community there are desirable available sites—by a stream, in a forest, or near a pleasant well-grassed hillside. Yet how many schools do we see where the healthy environment is entirely lacking—where the site was selected for the sole reason that it was available at a low price or that it was a gift. Money invested in a carefully selected school location will pay big dividends in community welfare—in health, contentment, and balanced living.

The environment of the community playground is another factor of prime importance in planning for balanced living. Trees, the pleasant (but safe) stream, the birds, the grass, the small, friendly wild animals should all be carefully considered when planning the complete playground. They contribute much to child development.

A father recently told me that on the regular Saturday morning trips to the grocer, his sons, aged seven and nine, always begged to stop at a playground in a beautiful little park containing a bird refuge. They paid no attention whatever to a nearby barren playground where the only facilities were a few swings, a baseball diamond, and a fence. My own two daughters, aged eight and



*U. S. Forestry Service Photo*

*Good surroundings aid growth*

ten, are exceptionally fond of a well-grassed community playground containing a long, gracefully-curved, low stone wall. The wall is a thing of beauty, recognized as such even at their age. They care nothing for their bare, dusty school playground. Yet many playgrounds contain only a fence and barren soil. They are not good for either child or parent.

**Build the Home With Beauty**

A healthful natural environment is of perhaps greatest importance for the home itself although in many instances it may be most difficult of achievement there. Happiness usually exists in a home with pleasant surroundings. However, many families must accept any home in which to live. They have little opportunity to select one with due consideration for environment, beauty, and peace. They are forced to live in homes or apartments definitely distaste-

ful to them because of their location and surroundings. Parents and children sense the lack of balanced living in such circumstances.

It is true that these are unusual times. However, had there been adequate attention given to "environment" in prewar community planning, much of the dissatisfaction with poor housing might have been eliminated. Fortunately, the current trend seems to be toward a healthful environment in residential planning.

Our children are our most precious possessions. Their environment will influence the lives of *their* children. If we make that environment healthful, we can be assured that it will carry on into future generations. It will even be improved. Wise use of our natural resources in community planning will aid the children in growing up today and make the task successively easier for each generation.



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