

Outdoor Musical Instruments for
Libraries and Reading Gardens

Music & Reading Gardens

Libraries fuel inspiration, and the inclusion of musical play opportunities within their key asset – outdoor space – ensures libraries fulfill their missions to effectively serve patrons of all ages and abilities with their programming while breathing musical life into every corner of the USA.

Making music brings people together like nothing else, and offering quality musical opportunities - on real instruments - for spontaneous music-making - provides an activity that people of all ages and abilities can enjoy.



Tropical Cyclone



Rainbow Bongos



Temple Block Tree



Liberty Bells



Firefly

Over the past few years, we have worked with a number of forward-facing, transformative libraries of all scales and in all climates, who have utilized their outdoor spaces to create inspirational music gardens and courtyards that provide equity of access to participative music-making within their communities.

Libraries and music are both magnets for social connections. Reinventing an outdoor space to create music gardens, courtyards, or sensory spaces can help foster connections and focus on wellness - for visitors and staff. These spaces hold a special place within the community, and are a place where friendships are forged, people can develop or learn new skills, and performances can be held.

With the future of music and the arts under threat, libraries may hold the key to securing its long-term availability and in turn become the new champions of music for the young and the young at heart.

“The music garden has helped the library accomplish our vision to meet the lifelong learning and enjoyment needs of our citizens, and provides a fun and educational space outside of the building that is accessible to all”

♪ **Tony Howard** ♪

Director of Pickerington Public Library



Palm Harbor Library's Outdoor Music Garden, FL

Palm Harbor Library in Florida recently opened an outdoor music garden made possible through new funding. This idea arose during the COVID pandemic when the library's foot traffic decreased dramatically.

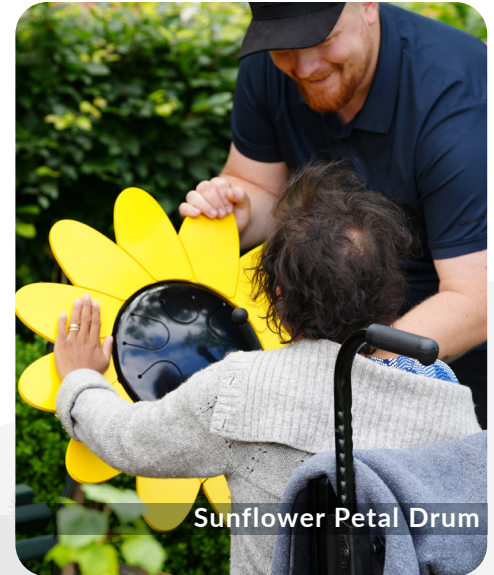
Palm Harbor Library has a history of promoting and supporting the visual and performing arts. Past and current collaborations include curated art pieces in the John Brock Art Alcove, a Children's Art MakerSpace, an outdoor sculpture, a partnership with the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art, and a musical instrument collection for loan. The new outdoor musical garden is another example of their commitment to nurturing future musicians within the community and encouraging people of all ages and abilities to come together and be creative.



Cyclone



Cavatina

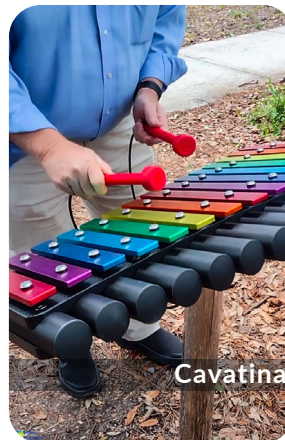


Sunflower Petal Drum

Gene Coppola, Library Director at Palm Harbor Library, comments, “When Covid occurred, not surprisingly, the library’s foot traffic decreased dramatically. The usage of many hands-on services declined, and library resources as a whole were impacted. It was during this dark time that opportunity rather than despair presented itself. It got the staff thinking in new ways about how best we can still serve; how to overcome these obstacles to accessibility. One way was to create a drive-thru window, and the other was an outdoor musical garden. The thinking for the latter was that since there was still a concern about entering a building where many people may be congregating, why not offer a service where residents can still enjoy the arts? And like that, the “Musical Garden” was born!”

Six outdoor instruments from Percussion Play were installed along the library’s west side adjacent to the “Reading Garden.” These instruments were the [Bell Lyre](#), [Cavatina](#), [Cyclone](#), [Rainbow Bongos](#), [Sunflower Petal Drums](#), and [Harmony Bells](#).

The library’s new addition were made possible through the estate of Dorothy & Frank Greenstreet, two community members who have given much to the library over the years. Their musical contributions through various programs accentuated the importance of the arts, providing so much pleasure to so many.



Cavatina



Rainbow Bongos



Bell Lyre

Music Ignites the Pollinator Garden at Benzies Shore Library, MI

Stacy Pasche's view outside her office at Benzies Shore Library was once just a pile of dirt. Now, outside the Library Director's office, there is a music garden designed to welcome nature and draw the local community into exploring what the library offers.

With a memorial donation from a local Frankfort resident, the library was tasked with creating a music-themed project. The team at the library agreed on creating a children's music garden. Stacy and her team worked hard to transform the area outside the library into a space that not only welcomes bees, butterflies, and birds but also encourages people in the community to come to the library and discover what it has to offer.

Stacy noticed Percussion Play's instruments at a park in a nearby town and decided to install similar outdoor musical instruments at her library. She chose a variety of instruments Inspired By Nature to complement the flowers and plants in the library's garden.



Sunflower Petal Drum



Harmony Bells Individuals



Liberty Bells

The Harmony Bells were chosen because of their sound. Stacy says, “We were impressed how the bells chime; they carry beautiful sounds. It seemed like a natural choice for the garden, and they look great. We liked the variety of the color, the shape, and the size—they’re great!”. Also within the music garden is the [Sunflower Petal Drum](#), which is particularly popular, and this is nestled next to the [Liberty Bells](#) in the corner of the garden.

Music was chosen as it complements the library’s literacy offerings. Stacy says, “Music plays a part in literacy in many ways. Just as taste, textures, and colors aid a child’s sensory development, so does music. Even before babies can talk, their babbling and sound play help them develop the neural pathways necessary for listening and speaking. Children mimic music and sound they hear as an additional way to understand and make sense of the world around them.”

Named the Harmony Garden, it attracts people of all ages and promotes intergenerational play. Grandparents bring their grandchildren to play music together, and, as Stacy says, the instruments have had an “amazing impact” on the community, adding, “They’re not just for children! It has been a joy to watch people of all ages explore the garden and the instruments.”

Stacy says, “We’ve seen our street presence increase, and people are now discovering their local library. The library is a nondescript brick building, a boring office, but since we’ve put in the Harmony Garden, people see that there is a library here now. We’re not hidden anymore, and it’s beckoning people to come play at the library. We’ve had more people coming in and exploring everything that we have to offer.”



Harmony Bells



Sunflower Petal Drum

Funktastic Rhythms at Dayton Metro Library, OH

During a system-wide facility upgrade to Dayton's 16 library branches, the community was asked what they would like at Dayton Metro Library, and one of the ideas that came out of the discussion was how they could reflect Funk in the library. The outcome was the creation of a music garden.

Jayne Klose, the Community Engagement Manager at Dayton Metro Library, was part of the team that renovated the library and helped create an outdoor play opportunity to honor funk music.

The team discussed which instruments would be most appropriate, and they soon realized they had to have drums, which would nod to funk music and James Brown's influence. They included the [Large Babel Drum](#) and [Cajon Drum](#). The [Papilio](#), [Emperor Chimes](#), and [Calypso Chimes](#) were included along with the [Rainbow Cavatina](#) and [Music Book](#).



Cavatina



Calypso Chimes (Diatonic)



Large Babel Drum

The percussion playground is used by the Children's Librarians, who use it for pre-school storytime. This session always includes some play elements. The playground is situated just off the patio, and the librarians regularly see children run over and play the instruments with little or no encouragement.

The Dayton Metro Library has partnered with an organization called 'Learn to Earn,' which initiated 'Play on Purpose' sites, or POP sites. These sites are marked with signs to encourage parents and caregivers to take advantage of spontaneous learning opportunities. Dayton Metro Library is now recognised as a 'Play on Purpose site' where early literacy is encouraged.

One of the features of this program is the percussion playground, where parents and caregivers are prompted to engage their children in conversations about vibrations and sounds. Additionally, visitors can learn about the history of Funk Music and even try playing some Funk themselves.

"We have families coming and going from the library who always start or finish their trip with a music jam. The beauty of these instruments is that the whole family can play. They're for everyone!"

♪ Jane Klose ♪

Community Engagement Manager at Dayton Metro Library



STEAM Education Through Music at Brighton District Library, MI

We have all seen how libraries can diversify, with many now offering more than just books. Today, libraries are sourcing innovative ways to introduce and foster community engagement in STEAM education – Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics.

Brighton District Library has added STEAM to its offerings by installing several outdoor musical instruments from Percussion Play. Instruments are dotted around the garden area, in different ‘nooks,’ and include the [Harmony Flowers Major](#) & [Minor Posy](#), [Rainbow Trio Ensemble](#), and [Cyclone](#).

The library decided to include instruments that can illustrate the science behind sound. Percussion Play’s Cyclone was picked as it illustrates cause and effect. Spinning the wheel will set the ball bearings inside the wheel into motion to mimic the sound of falling rain. From a gentle pitter-patter through a heavy rain shower to a full-on monsoon, players can control the intensity of the rain sound by how hard they spin the wheel, demonstrating the concept of cause and effect and encouraging gross motor skills. Next to the Cyclone, the library includes a sign explaining how the sounds are made. This provides the opportunity for caregivers to discuss the science of sound, promoting STEAM.



Literature, Nature and Music at Hendrick Hudson Library, NY

Making the most of its beautiful and large front garden, Hendrick Hudson Free Library decided to increase its outdoor programming and make the most of its unused outdoor space, starting with music!

Jill Davis, the library's director, wanted to create specific outdoor programs for the garden and decided that music was the answer. She decided to open the space up to its patrons and encourage music-making after discovering Percussion Play and its instruments.

When deciding on the instruments, they included the [Penta Post](#), [Rainbow Bongos](#), and [Sunflower Drum](#) – adding color to the garden. Shortly after, the library sought to honor a local father and daughter with a memorial. Both enjoyed music, and with a donation from the family, the library added the Rainbow [Cavatina](#) to the “music garden.”

Library staff were eager to bring literature and books into the space and have since created programs that encourage children to listen to stories related to music.

“Our outdoor music programs have been terrific for us and really bring together music, literature, and our natural world. We can't wait to include more instruments and expand our programming!”

♪Jill Davis♪

Library Director at Hudson Library

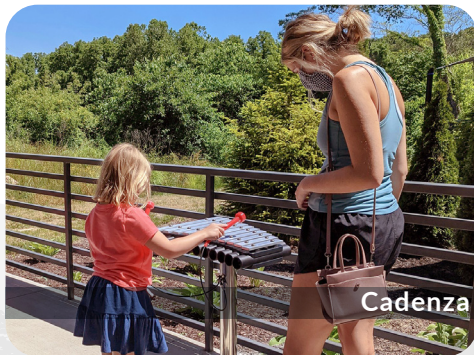


Musical Journey Across Scenic Regional Libraries, MO

Scenic Regional Library consists of nine branches across the three counties, with the Union branch being the first library to benefit from outdoor musical instruments. When the new building was built for the Union branch, this included a brand-new space for children where the library aimed to develop pre-literacy skills. Having come across Percussion Play instruments at an event, the library board fell in love with the idea of creating a space, especially for outdoor musical instruments, for everyone to enjoy.

The library was fortunate to receive money to purchase the first set of instruments, a [Soprano Quartet Ensemble](#). This ensemble includes the [Cadenza](#), a [Small Babel Drum](#), pair of [Congas](#) and [Soprano Pentatonic Freechimes](#). Everyone at the library, from children to elderly patrons, are enjoying discovering new sounds. The 'All Abilities Rainbow Center,' which helps adults with learning difficulties, regularly enjoys their interaction with the instruments.

Christy Schink, Associate Director of Youth and Outreach Services Librarian, says “It’s so lovely to hear chimes outside. The noise created by children playing the instruments provides a pleasant background noise at the library. There were concerns about how loud the noise might be, but the sound doesn’t carry, and we all enjoy the gentle chimes”.



A Melodic Storywalk® at Hubbard Public Library, OH

Mary Anne Russo, Children's Librarian at HPL, had her sights on Percussion Play's outdoor musical instruments, and after a successful fundraiser, community members are now enjoying playing music on its permanent 'StoryWalk®' on the grounds of the library.

As a volunteer, Cynthia Hirtzel helps the library to fund projects. After seeing Percussion Play's instruments, Cynthia also realized they would be perfect for encouraging children to spend time outside, away from technology and screens, and reconnect with nature.

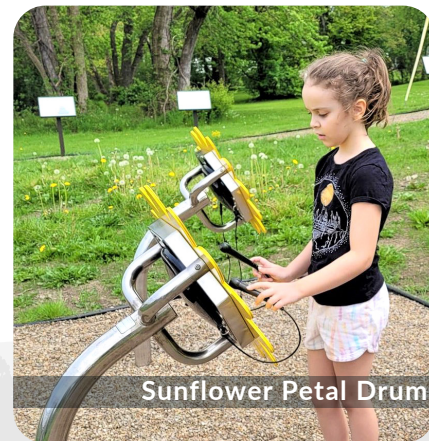
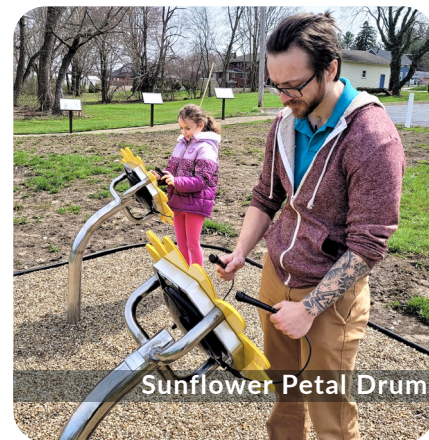
The instruments were installed and ready to use in November, and even though it was very cold, they quickly became one of the most popular activities in the garden. The instruments include the [Sunflower Petal Drums](#), which children love.

But it's not just children who enjoy the instruments; everyone who comes to the library and even those who don't have a library card can come and create music. Being located at the entrance to the library means everyone sees them, and even when the library isn't open on a Sunday, families come together to make music.

"It's all about democratizing music, and we are pleased about how accessible the instruments are. They are truly for everyone"

♪ Cynthia Hirtzel ♪

Volunteer at Hubbard Public Library



Harmony Made Easy: 7 Affordable Outdoor Music Solutions

With budget cuts affecting public programs, libraries are seeking creative, low-cost ways to enrich outdoor spaces and continue engaging their communities. Outdoor musical instruments provide an ideal solution—offering education, entertainment, and long-term value, all while encouraging creativity and social connection. Whether you're refreshing a reading garden or reimagining a courtyard, here are six affordable ways to bring music outdoors without overextending your budget.

1. Start Small with Single Instruments

A single outdoor instrument can transform your space. Budget-friendly pieces like the [Penta Post](#) or [Petal Drum](#) provide a hands-on, sensory experience and are compact enough for small outdoor areas. They're an affordable first step toward a vibrant sound garden.



2. Build Gradually Over Time

A large budget isn't necessary to make a lasting impact. If funds are tight, consider a phased approach—begin with one or two instruments that are effective on their own but designed to be part of a larger ensemble. This lets you enhance your outdoor space gradually while keeping costs manageable. Over time, you can build a vibrant, multi-instrument area that evolves with your library's needs and funding. Browse our [Ensembles](#) for inspiration on combinations that grow beautifully together.

3. Use Color and Sound to Draw People In

Vibrant and visually striking instruments like [Harmony Bells](#) or [Harmony Flowers](#) double as outdoor art—helping to brighten gardens, patios, and pathways with color and form. Their eye-catching designs invite spontaneous play and draw attention to underused spaces, offering both fun and functionality without the need for costly landscaping.

4. Create a Storytime Soundtrack

Bring your story sessions outdoors and pair them with sound! Outdoor instruments can add a new dimension to storytime and early literacy programs. Use [Drums](#) or [Chimes](#) to create sound effects during read-alouds—transforming simple stories into interactive, multisensory experiences that stimulate imagination and engagement. It's also cost-effective: you're enhancing existing programs, not adding new ones.



Harmony Made Easy: 7 Affordable Outdoor Music Solutions

5. Engage the Community

Invite local schools, families, or friends of the library to get involved with funding, sponsorship, or donations. Many communities are eager to support accessible, creative initiatives. A small [fundraiser or grant](#) application can go a long way toward helping install a new piece of musical equipment.

6. Choose Cost-Effective Sets

The [Rainbow Trio Ensemble](#) is a budget-friendly bundle of three compact, colorful instruments—perfect for libraries with limited space or funding. This trio introduces children and families to melody, rhythm, and harmony in a fun, space saving, and affordable way.



Rainbow Trio Ensemble



Rainbow Trio Ensemble



Rainbow Trio Ensemble Wall Fix

7. Use Existing Green Spaces Creatively

Transform a small seating area, garden, or pathway into a musical discovery zone. You don't need a full playground to offer rich experiences—just a few well-placed instruments can invite interaction, inspire creativity, and support wellness for visitors of all ages.

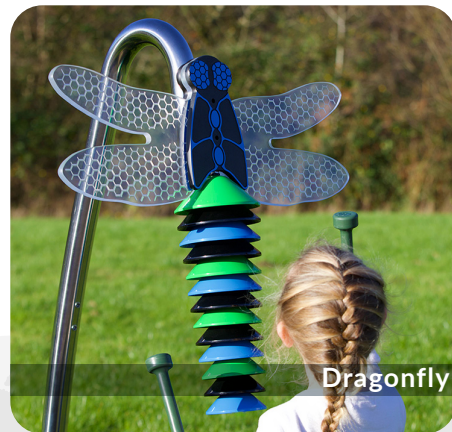
Pairing these instruments with a pollinator garden adds an extra layer of engagement, providing children with the opportunity to observe bees, butterflies, and birds while making music. This creates a multi-sensory space that connects sound, nature, and learning. Consider adding one of our musical [Bumblebees](#) or a [Dragonfly](#) for an extra touch of whimsy!

Musical Value Without the High Price Tag

Even on a limited budget, outdoor musical instruments can transform a small green space into a powerful community asset.

These durable, low-maintenance additions promote learning, creativity, and social connection—without ongoing costs or complex upkeep.

With just a few well-placed instruments, libraries can create joyful, inclusive spaces that enrich the community for years to come. space that connects sound, nature, and learning.



5 Reasons to Create an Outdoor Music Space at your Library

- ♪ A space where people of all ages and abilities can come to create music together. Music can bring a diverse group of people together in the community simply because it transcends language limitations. It provides its own language of rhythm and melody to enable players and users to communicate with each other non-verbally.
- ♪ The use of the pentatonic scale in many of the instruments addresses feelings of inadequacy by being so simple and easy to play; just play around and never hit anything inordinately dissonant in a safe musical haven. The technique is not a problem, given the simplicity of the instruments. Dissonance is not a problem, given the pentatonic scale – perfect for beginners and reluctant players.



♪ Music ignites all areas of child development: intellectual, social and emotional, motor, language, and overall literacy. Few things stimulate the brain the way music does. Making music develops important skills essential for success in life, such as concentration, confidence, and self-esteem. Music sessions can be tailored to look specifically at language, listening skills, or turn taking.

♪ Outdoor musical instruments can be used to integrate children's literature into music time by adding songs and sound effects to the stories and acting them out and awaken the imaginations. For children who may struggle with reading, or see it as more of a challenge – what a great way to draw the fun out of books and inspire a fresh, exciting way to engage with them: finding the melodies between the words!

♪ An invitation to experience the outdoors in a new and fascinating way, encouraging people of all ages and abilities to step outside into the fresh air and find a little harmony. Playing music helps to improve concentration, increases mobility and coordination, it reduces tension and promotes relaxation - plus the added benefits of being in the fresh air!

“We were looking for something to pull people out onto our outdoor patios in our new buildings, and these have been perfect. The company is great to work with and their products are exceptionally high quality.”

♪ Christy Schink ♪

Associative Director of Youth and Outreach Services at Scenic Library Missouri





TM



Global Sales & Manufacturing

Percussion Play Ltd

info@percussionplay.com

www.percussionplay.com

UK

01730 235180

USA/CAN:

(866) 882-9170 (Toll Free)

ROW:

+44 1730 235180

Trademarks are the property of Percussion Play. © 2019 Percussion Play. All rights reserved. Apple and the Apple logo are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. App Store is a service mark of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.



Download on the
App Store

GET IT ON
Google Play