



**nature hero
awards**
Schools making a home for nature

In partnership with

Glenveagh

Home of the new.



Nature Hero Awards Supported by Glenveagh

The Nature Hero Award is Ireland's outdoor learning award for schools. It is a mark of excellence for a school that recognises exceptional work by students and staff to help nature.

Instructions for the below projects can be found on our website:

www.biodiversityinschools.com

Before you start

Creation of a school map: Identify what you have before you start and identify where to focus your efforts. Include what nature you already have e.g. trees, flowers, greenhouse, etc. This is called habitat mapping and will guide you where to focus your efforts.

Creating Habitats

1. Bird Boxes. Add different types of bird nest boxes. Different boxes attract different birds. Some are open at the front, others have small circular entrance holes. Some schools even have owl boxes! Follow the instructions on the box and only buy FSC, sustainably made boxes.

Min 5 _____ Existing or New _____

2. Bat Boxes. An often-overlooked part of biodiversity. Place bat boxes to help these mammals around the school grounds on buildings and trees. Follow the instructions on the box and only buy FSC, sustainably made boxes.

Min 2 _____ Existing or New _____

3. Bird Care Station. It is important to look after your local birds by providing food such as seed and a water bath. A rota should be drawn up for maintaining this.

Min 1 _____ Existing or New _____



4. Nettles. Not everyone likes nettles but they are the nursery plant for many Irish butterflies. No nettles, no butterflies! Allow a patch of nettles to grow on the school grounds.

_____ sq m. Existing or New _____

5. Ivy. While often cut back on school grounds, Ivy is actually a superhero plant for biodiversity. It provides habitats for insects and birds, opens its flowers in autumn for hungry bees and grows berries in winter for hungry wildlife.

Where do you let ivy grow? _____

6. Native trees/ mini-woodland. Plant trees individually or in a group to create a mini woodland habitat. Only choose native Irish species. Schools with large areas need to be extra ambitious!

How many trees do you have? _____

Total added this year? Min 10 _____

7. Native hedgerow. Introduce a traditional Irish hedgerow habitat including species such as holly, hawthorn, blackthorn, etc.

How many metres of hedgerow do you have? _____

Total added this year? _____

8. Bug habitats/ dead wood/ log piles. Tidy often means dead! Create areas on the school grounds with log piles, rotting wood and leaf piles where bugs can thrive. See our website for ideas.

9. Let it grow/ meadow. Allow areas of grass grow longer than normal with a reduced mowing regime such as every 6 weeks. This will enable wildflowers to bloom. If your school is new and doesn't have old grass with a seedbank think about supplementing with native, Irish, organic wildflower seed. See our website for instructions on how to do this. Be very careful when choosing your seed!

Min 10 _____ sq m. Existing or New _____

10. Pollinator planting. Prioritize trees and flowers that will benefit pollinators such as bees and butterflies by choosing varieties rich with nectar and pollen. Maybe even create a pollinator patch dedicated to our invaluable pollinators. Prioritize native if possible.

_____ Existing or New _____



11. Spring bulbs. Flowers aren't just for summer! It's very important to plant spring bulbs during autumn so pollinators have a source of food in early spring. Consider snowdrop, crocus, blue-bells etc. Note that daffodils, while beautiful, have no nectar or pollen.

_____ sq m Existing or New _____

12. Solitary bee homes. Some bees like to live in unusual places such as sandy ground or wood. These areas are often removed from schools. Investigate our website for simple ways to give these pollinators a home.

13. Wetland/ Pond/ Boggy area. No school garden is complete without an area for frogs! Many schools have ponds. Find a method that works for your school in relation to health and safety to create a wet area – some micro ponds only need to be the size of a salad bowl! Larger ponds can be secured with grates. See our website for suggestions.

Food growing

1. School garden. Create an area in the school garden where all children have the opportunity to grow food each year. All classes should complete at least one growing project such as salad leaves, pumpkins, tomatoes and potatoes.

Best practice

1. Composting of food waste. We appreciate that not all food/ garden waste can be composted in larger schools. However, each school should have a demonstration area where composting of food waste is done for the educational value of recycling our organic waste into healthy compost.

2. Peat-free compost. You should only purchase compost that is free from peat. Peat is extracted from bogs resulting in catastrophic habitat loss and eradication of biodiversity. Therefore it should not be used in school and you can ask your supplier for an alternative.



3. No herbicides/ pesticides/ insecticides. Most chemical sprays cause serious damage to biodiversity and should not be used on school grounds. Discuss organic alternatives with your caretaker. There is advice on our website. Consider signing up to our No Spray School campaign.

4. Litter picking. The school grounds should be free of litter through a regular clean up lead by students.

5. Single-use plastic plan. Excessive use of plastics should be stopped and the school should have a management plan in place to remove single-use plastics such as encouragement of re-usable bottles.

6. Outdoor classroom. The school should have at least one outdoor classroom that is used to take learning outside.

7. Communication. It is so important that projects are communicated to students, staff and parents. This could be through signage.

8. Prominence Within reason. Projects should be placed in an accessible, prominent location and not relegated to 'invisible' areas.

9. Citizen science. Begin submitting your biodiversity observations to organisations like the National Biodiversity Data Centre, eg: reporting what birds visit your feeder, what species you spot in your pond, etc.



Outdoor learning

1. Encouragement of a nature table/board in each classroom. It is so important that children feel connected to the changing season. Introduce a nature table or board into each classroom that provides a space to investigate the changing seasons. Children can collect interesting items from around the school garden such as fallen leaves or common flowers.

2. Regular outdoor learning time. Children should be brought on a nature walk to the school garden or to a local park regularly to observe biodiversity. This could be integrated into a normal week such as after break time, outdoor classroom time, PE, Daily Mile or be a standalone feature. It also gives time to maintain the nature table/ board.

3. Structured nature learning programme. Children should be introduced to the basic native Irish species that are found around the school such as birds, bugs, wildflowers and trees. They should be able to identify the most common species as they progress through school. Check out our website for guidance.

4. Staff training. It is important that teachers are able to identify native Irish species found around the school and should receive training to ensure they have the confidence and ability to teach the children about these.

Development

Have any habitats been removed from the school grounds over the last year? If so, why was this and what was done to alleviate the loss of biodiversity?

Other

Is there anything else not mentioned above that you would like to highlight?



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On completion of your application form, please email to;

info@biodiversityinschools.com

We hugely appreciate your time and effort in taking part.

We look forward to reading through your supporting document which provides additional information such as photographs of the above activities.

This could be in the form of a powerpoint/pdf/video link/photo collage.

Please note that if your school is lucky to occupy a large site with lots of space we would appreciate if you could go above the minimum standards.

Signed _____
School _____
Position _____
Date _____

Please upload a copy of this form to our website at:

<https://www.biodiversityinschools.com/nature-hero-awards.html>