



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

In partnership with
Glenveagh
Home of the new.



Welcome to the Nature Hero Awards

The Nature Hero Award is Ireland's largest 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. It is delivered by Biodiversity in Schools and supported by Glenveagh.

The aim of the achievement is to create an educational space that nurtures a love of nature, develops a knowledge of our biodiversity and encourages action to help it locally. It covers many topics from nature conservation to school gardening, ecoliteracy to responsible citizenship as well as physical and mental wellbeing

The awards are open to all preschools, primary schools and secondary schools within the Republic of Ireland. To be a nature hero means going above and beyond to help biodiversity and a scale of ambition to lead other schools. The standards set by the award are not directed by us but instead based upon the achievements of other Irish schools.

All steps below must be complete in order to be considered for the award and supported with an evidence log such as photos or videos. Points are awarded for each step (points available in brackets). Please only apply if you have completed all steps (or a very good reason to skip particular steps).

Please note you must be pre-registered to take part in the awards.

All information to support projects on this application form are available on:

www.biodiversityinschools.com

www.biodiversityinschools.com/nature-hero-awards

www.biodiversityinschools.com/nature-hero-hub

A) Before you start

1) Creation of a school map and a team of nature heroes with assigned roles. Identify what you have before you start and identify where to focus your efforts. Include what nature you already have e.g. trees, flowers, hedgerow, etc. This is called habitat mapping and will guide where to focus your efforts. **(0)**

B) Creating habitats

2) 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 swift, house martin and owl boxes! Follow the instructions on the box and if purchasing only buy FSC, sustainably made boxes. **(5)** Minimum 5.

3) Bat Boxes. An often-overlooked part of biodiversity. Place bat boxes around the school on buildings and trees to help these mammals. Follow the instructions on the box and if purchasing only buy FSC, sustainably made boxes. **(5)** Minimum 2.

4) Bird Care Station. It is important to look after your local birds by providing food such as seed and a water bath throughout the entire year. A rota should be drawn up for maintaining this. **(5)** Minimum 1.

5) Nettles. Not everyone likes nettles but they are the nursery plant for many Irish butterflies. No nettles, no butterflies! Allow an area of nettles to grow on the school grounds. **(5)**

6) Ivy. While often mistakenly 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 peckish wildlife. This is wild ivy, not ornamental ivy. Allow ivy to flourish in areas around the school. **(5)**

7) 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 here! How many trees do you have? How many did you plant? If space is an issue consider a planting project off the school grounds. **(5)**

8) Native hedgerows. Introduce a native Irish hedgerow habitat. Please don't use non-native species. How many metres of hedgerow do you have? How many metres did you plant? Schools with large areas need to be extra ambitious here! Please note non-native species do not count. If space is an issue consider a planting project off the school grounds. **(5)**

9) Bug habitats. Tidy often means dead! Create areas on the school grounds with substantial log piles, rotting wood, rocks and leaf piles where bugs can thrive. See our website for ideas. **(5)**

10) No Mow. 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. Under no circumstances plant non-native wildflower seed. Schools with large areas need to be extra ambitious here! **(5)**

11) Pollinator planting. Prioritize trees and flowers that will benefit pollinators such as bees and butterflies by choosing varieties rich with nectar and pollen. Prioritize native if possible. Herbs are a particularly easy option for younger children. **(5)**

12) 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, bluebells etc. Note that daffodils, while beautiful, have no nectar or pollen. **(5)**

13) Solitary bee homes. Some wild 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 such as with a bee-bank. **(5)**

14) Wetland/ Pond/ Boggy area. No school garden is complete without an area for frogs! Find a method that works for your school to create a wet area. It could even be a damp, boggy patch. It could be a micro pond only the size of a basin. Indeed, many schools even have large wildlife ponds secured with fences and grates. See our website for suggestions. Space and safety are not acceptable reasons to refuse all frog habitats - you are trying to be a nature hero after all! **(10)**

15) Pitches for pollinators. Many schools have grass pitches lying idle for the summer but are still regularly cut. Consider donating your pitches to pollinators for the holidays by reducing your mowing regime. **(5)**

C) Best practice

16) 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 at the very least the concept of composting of some food waste is done for the educational value of recycling our organic waste into healthy compost. Consider a wormery option either. **(5)**

17) 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 or buy online. It might be trickier to source and sometimes be more expensive - but there's a big difference between doing what's right and doing what's easy! **(5)**

18) 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. **(10)**

19) Litter picking. The school grounds should be free of litter through a regular clean up lead by students. **(5)**

20) 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. **(5)**

21) Communication. It is so important that projects are communicated to students, staff and parents. This could be through signage, noticeboards, newsletters or the school website. **(5)**

22) Prominence. Projects should be placed in an accessible, prominent location and not relegated to 'invisible' areas. It's important that everyone sees your work and understands the school takes outdoor learning seriously, eg: projects located at the front of the school, not just the back. **(5)**

23) 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. This is the important data scientists need help with collecting. **(5)**

24) Developments. 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? **(5)**

D) Outdoor learning

If you are a secondary school please skip to step 31.

25) Outdoor classroom. The school should have at least one outdoor classroom that is used to take learning outside. **(5)**

26) School garden. Create an area in the school garden where all young people have the opportunity to grow food each year. All classes should complete at least one growing project to help them understand where their food comes from and the effort required to grow it. **(5)**

27) Nature tables/ boards in each classroom. It is so important that young people feel connected to the changing season. Introduce a nature table or board into each classroom that provides a space to investigate the changing seasons. Young people can collect interesting items from around the school garden such as fallen leaves or common flowers. There are lots of resources to print from our website to develop your space. **(5)**

28) Regular outdoor learning time. Young people should be brought on a mindful nature walk to the school garden or to a local park regularly to observe biodiversity. It also gives time to maintain the nature table/ board. **(5)**

29) Structured nature learning programme. Young people 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 assistance on ecoliteracy. **(5)**

30) Staff training. It is important that teachers are able to identify basic native Irish species found around the school and should receive basic training to ensure they have the confidence and ability to teach the young people about these. Please see our website for teaching resources.(5)

Only secondary schools complete Step 31.

31) Ecoliteracy in secondary schools. What programmes are in place (aside from set subjects) to ensure that all students graduating from your school engage with biodiversity education and are ecoliterate citizens for a more sustainable society? Eg: wellbeing programmes focused on nature, TY biodiversity projects. **(30)**

E) Optional

32) School policy. Consider integrating biodiversity into your whole school policy that places ecoliteracy on a similar level as digital skills, creativity, sports, etc **(optional step)**

33) Travel. Many secondary schools take students on overseas trips involving air travel. The impact of this travel is considerable considering the number of students involved. If alternative travel methods aren't used, or alternative destinations chosen, how has the school offset this pollution and how has this been communicated to students? **(optional step)**

34) Outreach. Biodiversity in Schools run the ReWild Child project whereby land is rewilded across Ireland for the next generation. Consider fundraising for this project as an outreach biodiversity action to support our work. More information on our website here: www.biodiversityinschools.com/rewild-child-project **(optional step)**

35) Healthy eating for the planet. Many schools have healthy eating policies in place. Consider 'healthy eating for the planet' for the school that encourages alternative lower carbon foods. Even an awareness day to raise the topic can be influential **(optional step)**

F) Other

36) Scale/ ambition. Please note the scale of your efforts is taken into account and the judging criteria is weighted in favour of ambition. Please note that if your school is lucky to occupy a large site with lots of space we would appreciate it if you could go above the minimum standards. **(40)**

37) Other. Is there anything else not mentioned above that you would like to highlight? **(0)**

38) If you won the grand prize of a school garden makeover to the value of €10,000 what would you do with it? **(0)**

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.

Signed _____

School _____

Position _____

Phone _____

Date _____