



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

In partnership with
Glenveagh
Home of the new.



The Nature Hero Award is Ireland's largest outdoor learning award across the education sector. 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** in partnership with **Glenveagh Homes**.

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 rewilding to school gardening, ecoliteracy to wellbeing.

The awards are open to all pre-, primary 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 for the award are not set solely by us, but also by the action and achievements of other Irish schools.

New for 2024/25, there are three levels of award which may be achieved: **Bronze Badger, Silver Stag** and **Golden Eagle**. The level of award your school earns will depend on the level of ambition & successful execution of actions to help biodiversity, as well as taking into account the standard of entries received from across the country (the Bronze Badger level has been designed so that most reasonably committed schools should be able to achieve it). There will also be one overall winner chosen from amongst the entries, which will receive a school garden makeover worth up to €10,000 (terms and conditions apply; see our website for details).

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

www.biodiversityinschools.com/workshops.html



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Summary of NHA process

Apply

- Register online to participate
- Receive Welcome & Information Pack

Action

- Conduct biodiversity action & education programme throughout the school year
- Keep a record!

Submit

- Submit record of all programmes & actions completed (including photo evidence)

Deadline:
4th April 2025

Results announced

- Receive notification of results via email
- Prizes awarded

May

(date will be announced closer to the time)

Actions for Biodiversity

Actions for Biodiversity

I. Creating Plans

1. School map
2. Decide actions
3. Make a schedule
4. Keep a record

II. Create Habitats

1. Birds
2. Bats
3. Planting & growing
4. Pollinators & other 'bugs'
5. Water Worlds

III. Creating Habits

1. Peat-free compost
2. No pesticides
3. Pollution
4. Composting
5. Water

IV. Creating Heroes

1. Outdoor classroom
2. School Garden
3. Ecoliteracy
4. Communication & Collaboration

Details of Actions

-----PLEASE READ CAREFULLY-----

- Complete as many of the following steps / actions as possible, in order to be deemed eligible for the award. You should carefully note the number of steps required in each section, as this is regarded as a minimum to earn the 'Bronze Badger' level Nature Hero Award.
Sections under the 'Bonus' heading are not considered necessary, but for schools hoping to achieve highly, they should aim to complete some or all bonus steps.
- Points are awarded for each step to assist us in the judging process (the maximum points available are given in brackets).
- Please also note the maximum word counts. Try to keep answers simple and to the point (some of the most successful entries in previous years had the shortest application forms).
- Only pre-registered school may submit an application form.
- **All actions must be supported with evidence.** This can be in the form of photos inserted into this editable Word document version of this document (see website), or via photo collage/ video/ PowerPoint.
- When you are ready to submit the completed application form and evidence, send all documents and evidence to the dedicated email address (please check www.biodiversityinschools.com/nature-hero-awards for the latest info).



I. Creating Plans

(complete all steps, 20 points)

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. Please submit your map.

2) Decide what actions to take. Using the map you made, make decisions about what action can be carried out and where. Are there areas that would be ideal for allowing to rewild/ no-mow? Is there a wet area that would be ideal for a wetland? Where could an outdoor learning area go? You don't need to submit this action plan; it is just for your own guidance.

3) Make a schedule. For example, you might aim to have bird boxes installed in the first week of October, trees planted by November, etc., as well as a schedule of regular tasks related to the school garden. You don't need to submit this schedule; it is just for your own guidance.

4) Keep a record. Don't forget anything you have done! Take photos (or even video) and take notes so that you don't forget all your hard work by the time you come to fill out the application form. Use your notes to fill out the rest of the form, and submit the photos and/or videos as evidence of the actions completed.

5) What would you do if you won the top prize of a school garden makeover worth up to €10,000?
(Max 250 words – this question does not contribute to the judging of your application)

II. Creating Habitats

(complete at least 6 of 12 actions)

1. Birds

1a. Nest 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 F.S.C., sustainably made boxes.

(5 points, max 50 words)

How many bird boxes do you already have? _____

Number of new bird boxes added: _____

Description/Notes:

1b. 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 points, max 100 words)

How many bird care stations do you already have? _____

Number of new bird care stations added: _____

Notes:



2. Mammals

2a. 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 points, max 50 words)

How many bat boxes do you already have? _____

Number of new bat boxes added: _____

Notes:

If you take other actions to help mammals, these can be detailed in the 'Creativity' section below (page 13).

3. Planting & Growing

All kinds of plants provide food and habitat for other species, and are important living things in their own right. Here are some impactful ways to incorporate native plants (which benefit Irish biodiversity more than non-native species):

3a. 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 points, max 50 words)

Notes:

3b. 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 points, max 50 words)**

Notes:

3c. Native hedgerows. Introduce a native Irish hedgerow habitat. 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 with the local community.

(5 points, max 50 words)

How many metres of native hedgerow do you already have? _____

Number of metres of native hedgerow have you planted: _____

Notes:

3d. Native trees/ mini-woodland. Plant trees individually or a group to create a mini woodland habitat. Only choose native Irish species. Schools with large areas need to be extra ambitious here! If space is an issue consider a planting project off the school grounds with the local community.

(10 points, max 100 words)

How many trees do you already have? _____

Number of new trees added: _____

Notes:

4. Pollinators & other bugs

4a. 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 points, max 100 words)

Notes:



4b. No Mow. Dedicate an area that will not be cut for at least a month, ideally much longer (the longer between cuttings, the more plants can flower and the more benefit to wildlife). Consider letting any and all grass areas grow without cutting over holidays – especially the summer! (Remember in practical terms to only let an area grow as wild as your caretaker can later manage with the equipment available.)

(10 points, max 100 words)

How large is your no-mow meadow? _____*

**(measurements can be in square metres, or e.g.: x2 car park spaces, x1 tennis court equivalent)*

Notes:



4c. Pollinator planting. Prioritise trees and flowers that will benefit pollinators such as bees and butterflies by choosing varieties rich with nectar and pollen. It's very important to also plant spring bulbs during autumn so pollinators have a source of food in early spring. Consider native snowdrops, crocuses and bluebells, etc. Note that daffodils, while beautiful, have virtually no food for our pollinators - they are all show!)

(5 points, max 100 words)

Notes:

4d. 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 points, max 100 words)**

Notes:

5. Water worlds. No school garden is complete without an area for frogs and their friends! Find a method that works for your school to create a wet area. It could even be a damp, boggy area, a micro pond, or even a large wildlife pond secured with fences and grates (see our website for suggestions) – where there's a will, there's a way! **(10 points, max 100 words)**

Notes:



III. Creating behaviours

(complete at least 3 of 5 actions; **Step 2 'No pesticides' is mandatory.**)

1. Peat-free compost. You should only purchase compost that is free from peat. Peat is extracted from bogs resulting in catastrophic habitat loss and total eradication of biodiversity. Peat-free compost is now widely available in garden centres and online.

(5 points, max 50 words)

Notes:

2. No sprays (pesticides / herbicides / insecticides). Most chemical sprays cause serious damage to biodiversity and should not be used on school grounds. Discuss organic alternatives with your caretaker. Remember, any sign of spraying such as brown scarring means immediate exclusion from the Nature Hero Awards.

(10 points, max 50 words)

Notes:



3. Pollution. Keeping your school grounds free of rubbish through regular litter picks is important. Your consumption of single-use materials is also important - how do you avoid single-use bottles? How do you handle excessive packing from school lunches (particularly from free/hot school lunches, if applicable)? **(5 points, max 250 words)**

Notes:

4. Composting. Add a composter or wormery to recycle *at least some* organic waste into compost. This is important for the educational value of turning unwanted waste into a useful resource. You don't need to compost all waste, but having at least a demonstration area within the school is important for young people to see. **(5 points, max 100 words)**

Notes:

5. Water. Add rainwater butts/ harvesters to collect run-off from the school roof for your garden. This saves on using costly treated drinking water from the school taps. **(5 points, max 50 words)**

Notes:



IV. Creating Heroes

(complete **at least 2 of 4** actions, but you should aim for **all 4 actions** if your school has the ability)

1. Outdoor classroom. The school should have at least one outdoor classroom/ designated learning space that is used to take young people outside. This can be for any and all subjects, including nature education. **(10 points, max 250 words)**

Notes:

2. School garden. Create an area where young people have the opportunity to grow food and to help them understand where their food comes from and the steps required to grow it. For smaller schools, don't worry - no area is too small. **(5 points, max 100 words)**

Notes:

3. Ecoliteracy. A structured nature learning programme should be in place at the school. The aim of this is that both staff and students know the common Irish species and are given time to explore nature. This must go beyond the basic requirements of the curriculum.

E.g. Nature tables/ boards, introducing regular, dedicated, meaningful nature walks, staff training/ CPD, designating a teacher such as a garden coordinator, etc.

(20 points, max 250 words)

Notes:

4. Communication & Collaboration. It is vital that your nature work is communicated to the entire school community (all students, staff and parents) and while a core team may drive the work, everyone is involved / aware in some way. Additionally, you could engage with the wider community. **(20 points, max 250 words)**

Notes:

Bonus

1. Creativity: Did you take any other relevant actions for biodiversity (not in the options above)? Please give details. **(10 points, max 250 words)**

Notes:

2. Progress. If you have entered the Nature Hero Awards in previous years, what progress (previously outlined) has been made during this school year? **(0 points, max 100 words)**

Notes:

3. 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 and beyond - the scale of your efforts is taken into account and the judging criteria is weighted in favour of ambition. This is assessed on your previous answers / actions. **(20 points, 0 words)**

