

Hi! My name is Síolta the Squirrel and I love exploring nature.

Some of you may remember doing the Family Explorer Challenge in previous years, where we visited lots of places around County Carlow. Now of course, we all have to stay much closer to home, but we can still do lots of exploring in our own gardens and just outside our homes. The lovely people of County Carlow Sports Partnership like to help everyone to stay active and they asked me and some friends to help out. Una Halpin of Wildways Adventures, Johanna Brown of Wildtime and Mary White of Blackstairs Eco Trails have all designed some outdoor challenges to help give you some new and different ways to stay active and learn about biodiversity at the same time.

Whether you have a large garden in the countryside or are simply taking short walks on the streets of a town or village, there is always something new to notice, especially in springtime, where you may see new leaves on the trees, new flowers cropping up in the grass verges, insects crawling or flying about and birds singing as they prepare to build their nests. Remaining close to home is a great opportunity for looking at the small details that we may have been too busy to notice before.

Adults can help by joining in with the activities and by helping to make your gardens more wildlife friendly. Simple actions like mowing less often to allow important wildflowers like dandelions and clover to grow in the grass; not cutting trees and hedges during the spring and summer nesting season and cutting out chemicals such as herbicides, pesticides and poisons can all help. These actions will help provide food and shelter for lots of species, making our planet a nicer place to live and you will have plenty to see and explore all through spring and into summer. Adults can also check out Family Explorer Challenge on Facebook for details of where you can find some extra challenges.

I hope you like our challenges and that you all join in and explore “Nature on Your Doorstep”.

Síolta



Leaf and Bark Rubbings Challenge

Bark and leaf rubbings can be a simple way to collect many interesting patterns. Try this easy outdoor activity for kids on a dry day, because wet tree bark can make your paper tear.

You will need:

- Large crayon or coloured chalk
- Paper or tracing paper
- Trees
- Hair spray
- Craft glue
- Notebook
- Pen



Bark Rubbings:

- Step 1: Peel the paper from a large crayon, or use a thick piece of chalk or charcoal.
- Step 2: Press a sheet of thin paper up against the bark of a tree.
- Step 3: Gently rub the side of the crayon or chalk on the paper until the pattern of the bark shows.
- Step 4: Compare rubbings from different trees. Which bark patterns make the nicest rubbings? Can you tell which rubbing came from which kind of tree?
- Step 5: Glue your rubbings in a scrapbook to make a “Bark Book.” Include some interesting facts about the trees.



Leaf Rubbings:

- Step 1: Collect interesting leaves, and lay them flat on a hard, smooth surface.
- Step 2: Cover the leaves with paper, and rub the side of the crayon or chalk on the paper.
- Step 3: Ask an adult to spray the pictures with hair spray to keep the chalk from smearing.

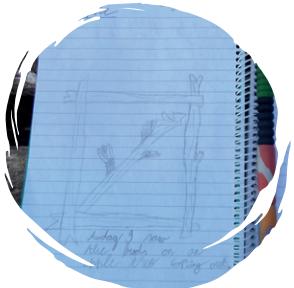


Spring Diary Challenge

In springtime, it is very easy to explore nature on your own doorstep. There is plenty to discover either within your own garden or just outside your home. We challenge you to create your own spring diary to track the changes happening around you and get to know the wildlife on your doorstep.



Decide what things you are going to record and how you are going to do it. You could:



Keep a notebook to record details such as when trees come into leaf and when flowers first appear.



If you plant any flowers or vegetables in your garden, you could also track their progress.



Write and draw in your notebook.



Take lots of photographs.



Making simple frames to hang on the trees means that you can photograph the same part of the tree each time.

Start Observing and Recording



You don't need to record every tree or plant every day. Just check your garden regularly and make note of anything new.



When trees are coming into leaf, you might see big changes over the course of a few weeks.



Make note of any new flowers in your garden. If you're keeping a look out regularly, you may see different insects visiting your flowers.



Remember that it is important to have wild spaces in your garden to allow wildlife to live. Delay the first grass cut to allow dandelions to flower and let areas of grass grow for up to 6 weeks at a time to encourage clover and other pollinator friendly flowers .



Lots of trees have flowers which you may not have noticed before. Look out for them.



Don't worry if you don't know the names of the trees and flowers in your garden. If you want, you can make up your own names for the moment and maybe try and identify them later.

If you want to find out more about wildlife in your garden and start identifying and recording wild plants and animals, the following websites can help:

The All Ireland Pollinator Plan

<https://pollinators.ie/> has lots of resources to help you learn about pollinators and make your garden pollinator friendly

The National Biodiversity Data Centre

<https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/> has lots of resources for identifying and recording wildlife in your garden

Zoë Devlin's website

<http://wildflowersofireland.net/> is a great beginner's website for identifying wild flowers and even has a list of what is flowering right now

The UK Woodland Trust

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/03/tree-id-kids/> has leaf and twig identification sheets



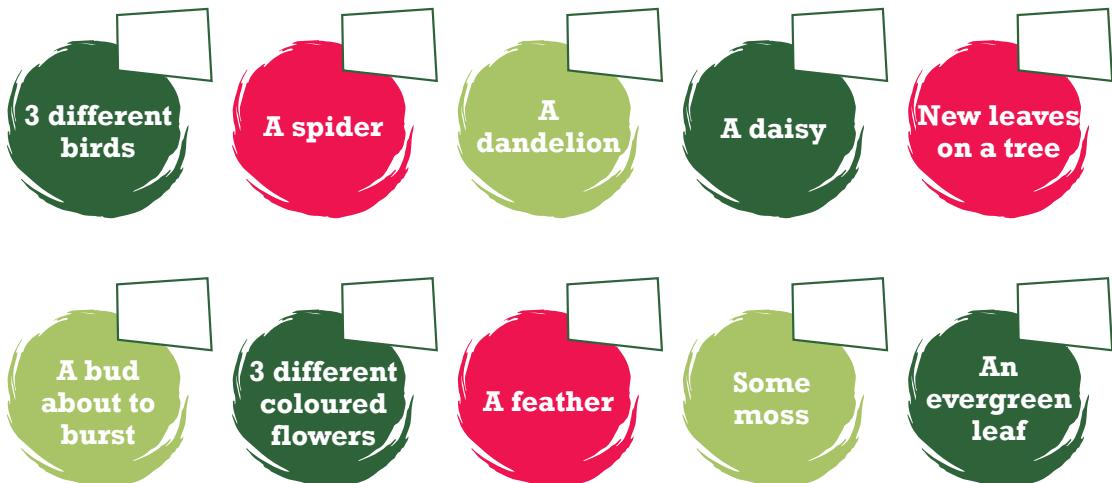
Garden Scavenger Hunt Challenge

A scavenger hunt encourages you to look around your garden or the area close to your home and see what natural items you can find. We have lots of different ideas for scavenger hunts here and we also encourage you to come up with your own ideas.

It is important to protect wildlife in our gardens so if we are collecting things for a scavenger hunt, it is better to take flower petals and leaves that have fallen to the ground rather than picking them and to gather fallen twigs rather than breaking them from a tree. In many cases, we don't need to gather anything at all, simply observe them, tick them off on a list or photograph them.

Simple Spring Scavenger Hunt

Look for the following things in your garden or your local area and tick them off when you see them



Matchbox Challenge

Each person is given a matchbox or other small container with a lid. An envelope will do if you don't have any small containers. Challenge your parents or siblings to see who can collect the highest number of different items in the same time period.



Word or Letter Challenge

Pick a word or maybe use the letters of your name and find something in your garden that begins with each letter of the word. You can either make a list or collect the items. For a longer challenge see if you can find something that begins with each letter of the alphabet. This could carry on over a number of days and will probably involve some creative descriptions.



Sound Hunt

Spring is a great time to notice the sounds of nature. How many of these can you hear?



Smell Hunt

We all like to smell flowers sometimes but there are other smells in our gardens too. See how many different smells you notice in the garden. Flowers, herbs, leaves, fruit and vegetables all have different smells.



Colour Hunt

Make your own colour match sheet using scraps from a magazine and see if you can find colours in your garden to match each colour on the sheet.



Photographic Challenge

Challenge yourself to take photographs of the following things. For some of these, there will be the extra challenge of being patient and staying still and quiet long enough to get the shot.



Mini Beast Hunt Challenge

Being outdoors makes us happier!

When we are out walking or climbing a hill or taking a stroll by a river, we feel calmer, stress falls away. Even better is not to look at your phone and just enjoy, being outdoors with friends and family. You don't even have to go on a big, long hike, just being outside makes us happier. Smell the wild flowers, hear the bees buzzing and watch wind ripple water on a pond, lake or on a river. Look up, watch the clouds or a bird soaring high above you. Enjoy the rhythm of just walking along using your five sense (sight, touch, hearing, taste, smell). Being outdoors is good for your health and above all makes us happier. Let's go!



Let's all go on a bug hunt!
How many can you spot?



Worm



Bumblebee



Ladybird



Where did you find it?

Where did you find it?

Where did you find it?

Date:

Date:

Date:



Moth



Butterfly



Snail



Where did you find it?

Where did you find it?

Where did you find it?

Date:

Date:

Date:



Spider



Millipede



Slug



Where did you find it?

Where did you find it?

Where did you find it?

Date:

Date:

Date:

COVID-19: It is important to stay up to date as social distancing guidelines may change over time. The most up to date advice, information and resources can be found on: www.hse.ie and www.health.gov.ie

Nature on Your Doorstep challenge sheets brought to you by Carlow Sports Partnership in collaboration with Blackstairs Eco Trails, Wildtime and Wildways Adventures