

January – Preparing for Nature’s Reawakening

The wintertime is often looked upon as being a quiet time in nature, and a dormant time in the garden. There is however so much going on, and plenty of action that can be taken on the Biodiversity theme at this time. Three key areas of focus, learning and action are explored below.

1. Planning your Growing Spaces

Winter is the perfect time for planning improvements that can be made to gardens and outdoor spaces, with respect to enhancing and encouraging wildlife and nature.

Animal diversity can’t really be forced, it can only be attracted in; this is done by giving it space and improving the diversity of plants and habitats.

Allowing areas to go a bit wild where possible, and installing specific landscape features to mimic nature, are critical elements to supporting greater diversity in living things in school gardens and across the campus.



See the table below for links to instructions on how to grow, create or install some popular landscape features that can help Biodiversity. Consider which features make most sense for your committee, school grounds and community and prioritise these.

2. Taking Seasonally Appropriate Action in the garden

Plants

We can take advantage of the winter dormancy or inactivity in many plants over the colder months. This time of slow or no growth is the right time to do the following task:

- Plant native bare-root trees.
- Split larger herb plants into small pots.
- Take hardwood cuttings from fruit bushes.
- Pot up raspberry cane “runners”
- Pot up strawberry runners
- Source seeds (buy them if you didn’t collect/save seeds last summer/autumn)

A quick online search for ‘how-to do’ any of the above tasks will throw out lots of helpful video suggestions from a range of gardening websites.

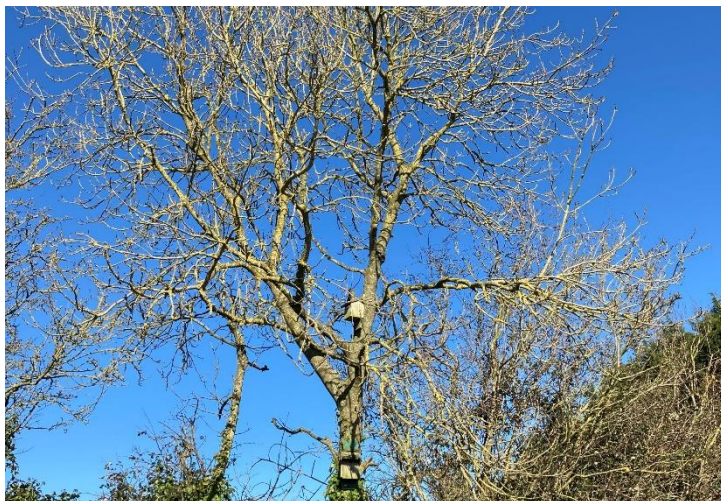
Animals

Bird and Bat Boxes

If installing nest boxes or roost boxes for birds and bats respectively is something that you had planned to do, now is the time to act. Birds will start to nest prospect very soon; some may have already started. They need a good deal of time to become accustomed to new sites or nest boxes, so if boxes are put up too late into the Spring, the chances are they will not be used until the following year.

Overall it is important to be specific with your plans; know what species you are hoping to cater for, and install the nest boxes and in appropriate locations.

Bat boxes are typically used April to October. Again it is best to get the boxes installed before the bats emerge from hibernation.



Bird Tables

Feeding birds throughout the year can be a great way to support local bird populations as well as building up knowledge and understanding of your local wildlife.



Bird tables and bird feeders can be a very important source of energy and nutrients to birds, especially during cold snaps. However, it is crucial that whoever is responsible for the bird feeding stations is aware of pitfalls, such as inappropriate food, dangerous feeders, and bird diseases associated with a lack of cleanliness.

The table below provides links to information on how to ensure that all of the above tasks are done to the highest standard, with our little winged neighbours in mind.

3. Identifying Citizen Science Opportunities

There are many National Monitoring Schemes that the average citizen can participate in. Some of these very exciting opportunities are listed below. Now is a good time for planning which, if any, monitoring schemes might be of interest for individuals or groups in your school community, as many of them will commence in the coming weeks.

- [Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme](#)
- [Bat Monitoring and Distribution Programmes](#)
- [Irish Hedgehog Survey](#)
- [Irish Garden Bird Survey](#)
- [Other monitoring schemes including hedgehog, butterflies and 'Explore your Shore'](#)



Table: Guidance for Habitat and Landscape Features

Campus Features	Guidance
Plant Trees	https://leafireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/AnCB-TS3-Tree-Plant-List.pdf
Window Boxes	https://pollinators.ie/resources/
Bird Feeders/Tables	https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/feeding-birds/
Bird Nest Boxes	https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/nestboxes/
Organic Veg/Herb Bed	https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Garden-Wildlife-Booklet-WEB-17MB.pdf
Bug Hotel	https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Garden-Wildlife-Booklet-WEB-17MB.pdf
Log/Rock/Leaf Piles	https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Garden-Wildlife-Booklet-WEB-17MB.pdf
Native Wildflower Patch	https://pollinators.ie/resources/
Unmanaged Wildlife Area	https://pollinators.ie/resources/
Compost Heaps	https://stopfoodwaste.ie/resources/composting
Bat Boxes	https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Garden-Wildlife-Booklet-WEB-17MB.pdf
Pond	https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/Garden-Wildlife-Booklet-WEB-17MB.pdf