



Scottish Junior Forester Award

Leader Handbook

Updated 2024





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Aims

The Scottish Junior Forester Award aims to give children and young people of all ages an insight into the skills needed for a career in Forestry as well as equipping them with the practical ability to assist in woodland management in their schools and local communities.

How do I use this Leader Handbook?

The Leader Handbook outlines what is involved in running a Scottish Junior Forester Award. The activities suggested are just a guide and should be adapted to suit your setting, the group, the time available and your skills and experience. As much as possible, share responsibility, decision-making, planning and preparation with participants.

Who is it for?

The Scottish Junior Forester Award is aimed at anyone in school, youth work or community settings in Scotland. Teachers, educators, and community organisations can deliver it

What does the Scottish Junior Forester Award involve?

It is a self-delivered programme of 6 Sections. Participants complete practical tasks and enhance their knowledge of trees, woodlands and forestry. Delivery makes use of resources and information outlined and signposted in this Handbook.

Sections include:

- Managing Risk
- Tree and Plant ID
- Woodland Habitats
- Habitat Creation
- Woodland Management – there are two different pathways depending on your needs and interests: Pathway A: Tree Planting or Pathway B: Tool Use
- Forestry Ambassadors

What facilities are needed to run the Scottish Junior Forester Award?

You will need easy access to some trees, preferably at least six different species. These do not need to be planted as a woodland - they can be in and around school grounds, in a hedgerow or nearby in the local community.

Find your local greenspace here - [Greenspace Map for Outdoor Learning](#)



Do staff need to undertake specific training to deliver this award?

The Scottish Junior Forester Award has been designed to be accessible and deliverable by teachers, educators and youth/community leaders without the need for specific qualifications.

Please note: if you choose to complete the ‘Tool Use’ activities then appropriate training around tool safety with young people is essential. Check out the [OWL Scotland website](#) for available training.

What resources will we need?

- A Junior Forester Award booklet for each participant optional (a downloadable booklet will be sent from Royal Forestry Society when you register).
- Participants will need clothing that they can get muddy, ideally have a full change of clothes with them, sturdy footwear and waterproofs / sun protection depending on the weather.
- Optional resources are mentioned alongside suggested activities. These can be adapted to suit what you have available, the age of your group and their interests.
- Certificates – a downloadable version will be sent when you register or you can purchase hard copies from the [Royal Forestry Society shop](#) on successful completion.

Health and safety

In providing activities, the Award Provider (and those participating on an individual basis) is wholly responsible for ensuring that adequate safety procedures are in place. This may include Health and Safety Regulations, and insurance.

Remind the group about where the geographic boundaries are, how you will call young people back if you need them, what they should do if they need you, and any risk assessment information relevant to your site.

Participants should be clearly instructed not to pick up anything which:

- Is alive e.g. minibeast or other animal, unless an adult is with them
- Is growing e.g. still attached to the ground or a plant/ fungus
- Is dead e.g. a dead mouse. Fascinating but best supervised by an adult wearing gloves
- Is animal waste
- They are not sure of or could cut themselves on.

If in any doubt about something they have found in the woodland they should always leave it well alone and call an adult to look at it, rather than bringing it to the adult. This is of particular relevance in busy or urban areas with adjacent pedestrian access, where hazardous litter may have been thrown or pushed through a fence.





Section 1: Managing Risk

Learning Objective: I will be able to keep myself and others safe in Scottish Junior Forester Award activities.

Skills: As a Confident Individual in planning and delivering activities I can assess risks, recognise benefits and take informed decisions.

Resources: Site Risk Assessment [Learning through Landscapes Generic Risk Assessments](#)

Connecting

Questions for participant discussion

What hazards do they think there are in the forest? How should they stay safe?

Why does a forester need to ensure their forest is safe as necessary?

It is really important in this first session to establish their existing level of knowledge about the woodland area and to challenge any misconceptions. Our experience of working with many children from urban areas tells us that they often think that there are bears and wolves in the forest that might harm them. We want them to stay safe in the forest but also to relax and enjoy being there without worrying about things that will not happen.

Challenging

What is the risk/s (the chance, high or low that any hazard will cause someone harm) that they have identified and what control measures are they going to put in place? Can they use cones or warning signs to identify hazards (something that can cause harm) in their forest?

Can they balance out the benefits of an activity against the risk? What about probability?

This section is all about balance and consideration, it is technically possible that an alien space ship could crash on the forest while they are in it but is it likely? You could try to remove every trip hazard from a forest but is that good for the animals who live there? How do you balance their needs?

Consolidating

What practical measures are needed to make tree and woodland settings safe for participants and for visitors? This might include:

- Clearing paths and edging them with branches or logs to show where it is safe to walk.
- Litter picking and making signs to ask people to take litter home or to keep dogs on leads
- Pulling up nettles or cutting back brambles (without overall impact on the natural qualities of the site).





Section 2: Tree and Plant ID

Learning Objective: I will be able to identify different tree species and woodland structure.

Skills: As a Successful Learner, I can use STEM Skills for learning.

Resources: [OPAL Tree ID guides](#), [Woodland Trust's Tree Identification app](#), [FSC Guides](#) or similar, sheets or tarpaulins (at least one between 6), means of writing labels.

Connecting

Questions for discussion

Which tree names are already known?

How can we tell the difference between each type of tree?

What things influence why trees are different?

Why does a forester need to know the names of different trees in their forest? Were these trees always here or have people influenced what has grown or been planted?

Challenging

Depending on the size and variety of your wooded area/s, how many different types of tree can be identified (by leaf, bark, bud, appearance as well as/instead of by name)? How old are the trees? Is there a mixture of ages from seedling to established trees? How many different plant layers can you see, from ground layer to canopy (see [woodland structure](#))?

Activity ideas:

Practice science-based identification skills. Collect different types of fallen leaves. Spread them out on their sheet or tarpaulin. Sort them into groups that are similar. What features help identify different leaves?

Use ID guides to identify and write labels for what is found? Bring suitable materials with you or source natural materials from the forest floor. If there are not many loose items, take an ID chart around the area and see what can be identified. Take photos of different tree species identified and add labels.

Extension: Could they use these to create a map or their own ID guide relevant to your woodland area? Which tree species may be native to Scotland and which have been introduced?



Section 3/4: Woodland Habitats and Habitat Creation

Learning Objective: I will know about different types of woodland habitats and have practical experience of creating homes for wildlife.

Skills: As a Responsible Citizen, I can evaluate environmental issues and make informed choices and decisions.

Resources: Depending on your site, you may need to find some logs, sticks, leaves etc. to bring in for participants to enhance the woodland habitats. For younger children, a set of soft toys can introduce the idea of creating homes for forest wildlife.

Connecting

What different types of wildlife live here? What is biodiversity?
 Do animals need help? What can we do that is appropriate? (See below for ideas) How can our woods be healthier?
 Why have some animals that used to live in our forests vanished?
 Why does a forester need to know what lives in their forest?

Carry out a survey of the animals within your site through activities like a bug hunt and using field work skills such as making pitfall traps and tree beating. Look for signs of wildlife or build your own hide to watch them.

Challenging

Hibernation: In autumn, build hedgehog homes by making a tepee of sticks and covering them with a thick layer of leaves for insulation. See here for how to [help hedgehogs](#) and make a [hedgehog home](#).

Dead Hedging, Habitat Piles:

It is very easy for a regularly used forest site to have a completely bare ground layer as feet trample any new growth, trip hazards are removed and fallen branches used for den building and crafts. Can they identify any areas which they are going to “set aside” as wildlife areas and not go into? Collect up fallen branches and other dead material to make a “dead hedge” which marks this as a protected area as well as providing a habitat for wildlife itself.

Bat and Bird Boxes: Build [nest boxes](#) suitable for the bird species in your site with RSPB guidance, and build [bat boxes](#) with help from the Bat Conservation Trust.

Consolidating

Discuss or write “I went to our wood and I saw....?”
 As a group, recall all the animals that might be found living in the local woodland, or a forest your group has researched.



Section 5: Woodland Management

Pathway A: Tree Planting

Learning Objective: I will know what sustainable forestry is, its role in woodland management, and have practical experience of planting trees.

Skills: As a Responsible Citizen, I can develop informed, ethical views of complex issues. As an Effective Contributor, I can work in partnership and in teams.

Resources: Trees are often available free to groups through a variety of local and national schemes. Alternatively, they can be grown from seed or from 50 cm high “whips” that can be purchased relatively inexpensively from a variety of companies. Choose native varieties that will grow well in your chosen location and support local biodiversity.

Stakes and tree guards are supplied with Woodland Trust [Free trees for schools and communities](#).

Depending on the quality of soil in your area and what may be found in it, gloves may be helpful.

Use digging tools suitable for the age group that will be using them, and watering cans.

Connecting

This topic is ideal for participants to research beforehand. Can they find some statistics on deforestation? How does this have a connection with climate change? What is sustainable forestry? Watch film: [Sustainable Planting and Industry in a Forest Environment](#) . Make a list of how trees help us.

What do trees need to grow? Collect natural materials to create a diagram that shows all the things that trees need.

Challenging

In deciding where to plant trees (which will involve some planning), it is important to involve participants as much as possible. Many sites in Scotland will be vulnerable to predation by deer; consideration about how to protect young trees may be needed.

If you live in an urban area, you may be able to help your local [‘Wee Forest’](#) get started.



The Woodland Trust provides free trees for schools and communities; “[Tree tools for Schools](#)” an excellent resource to help with planning; [tree planting advice](#) and a [tree planting video](#). It is also worth checking on tree availability through TCV’s community programme [I Dig Trees](#).

Activities described in the OWL Scotland [Tree Measuring](#) resource can help support delivery of the curriculum outdoors throughout this whole process of planning, planting and recording the life of trees from young sapling stage.

1. Depending on whether you are planting an individual tree, a hedgerow, or a small area of woodland, choose the correct stocking density and mark it out.
2. Use an appropriate hand tool to dig a hole for your tree.
3. Place the tree in the hole. Push the soil back around, it pressing firmly.
4. Push a stake into the ground next to your tree, close enough that it will fit inside your tree guard.
5. Put your tree guard over the tree and its stake, checking it is the right way up. Push well into the ground to prevent small mammals such as voles from getting underneath to eat the base of your tree.

Consolidating

Tree planting is a great exercise in patience and commitment. It is likely that there will be a wait of months or years to see a recognisable tree growing (though perhaps not for seedlings and saplings to grow). Activities like those described in the [Tree Measuring](#) resource can keep them engaged in the changes that take place over time.

Make plans for keeping trees watered, free of weeds and protected from anything that might want to eat them. Help them survive their first few years and grow to be recognisable trees. Write an article for the school/ community newsletter. Prepare an assembly/ event to explain to the rest of the school/ community why the trees are being planted and how everyone can look after them.

Tree planting season is November to March. This ensures that trees go into the ground in conditions that give them the best chance to become established and grow into mature trees. If you want to carry out the planting activities outside this window you may wish to consider planting shrubs or collecting and planting tree seeds instead (or additionally).





Pathway B: Tool Use

If doing tool use activities, the staff leading the group must have undertaken appropriate training and be competent in using tools safely with young people.

Learning Objectives: I know about tree health, can help with managing woods as a renewable resource and have practical skills in using a range of tools.

Skills: As an Effective Contributor, I can apply critical thinking in new contexts

Resources: Appropriate tools and protective equipment.

Connecting

Why do we manage woodlands and sometimes have to fell trees? (E.g. different tree ages, where there are pest or diseases; and for wildlife benefits such as greater species diversity and removing exotics/ non-native species etc.).

Explore the different reasons for managing woodland (e.g. quality timber production; recreation and access; tree health).

Play [tree games](#)

Find a variety of objects pre-hidden and say if they come from a tree or not.

Challenging

Set up a scenario:

Participants are foresters considering what is best to do with the trees/woodland setting, and why. Depending on what type of improvement or change is agreed, do any plants or trees need removing, pruning or coppicing?

Are they:

- Too close to another tree, and limiting its growth?
- Diseased or damaged?
- In an area where you want to create a clearing to improve the variety of habitats for wildlife or for access/ leisure uses?
- A tree that has self-seeded (and it may be a non-native species)?
- Suitable for coppicing, to create multi-stemmed trees for structural diversity or provide resources like hazel or willow rods.

Use chalk to mark the trees selected for removal so that decisions can be reviewed before using any tools. Agree what is the best way to deal with the felled tree (e.g. removal for wood products, leave dead wood lying as a habitat pile).





Section 6: Forestry Ambassadors

Learning Objective: I know about how people use woods and forests.

Skills: As an Effective Contributor, I can take the initiative and lead.

Connecting

This offers a great research opportunity. What trees and woodland are in your local area? See the [Greenspace Map for outdoor learning](#). How many different reasons are there to visit a woodland – for participants, and for others? How should people use woods and forests responsibly e.g. not leaving litter, responsible fire lighting?

What type of jobs are there connected to woodland management? What different skills do you need to have (relate to STEM skills? What does a forester do? See [OWL Scotland](#) and Royal Forestry Society's [Careers in Forestry](#). The [Tree Explorer activity](#) pack includes activities to explore being a Wildlife Rangers, Forester or Tree scientist.

Bring along some objects to discuss and explore their connection with a forest e.g. a cycling helmet, a pair of binoculars, climbing rope. Set up examples of a 'bad' and 'good' wild campsite role-play. Explore responsible access through [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).

Challenging

Activity ideas:

A Mini Forest Park: Set up a role of 'Forest Manager'. What leisure facilities would the public need or want? Create a miniature model of a forest park using materials found in the woodland.

Welcoming Visitors: Use knowledge of the site – its trees and related points of interest - built up through the previous Sessions to give tours of the forest area and explaining its features.

Consolidating

Invite visitors to the woodland area for tours and demonstrations.

Write a woodland management plan to agree ongoing aims and tasks once the Scottish Junior Foresters programme is completed.

Explore the [Charter for Trees, Woods and People](#) . Will you sign up to support these principles to reconnect young people with nature?



Recognising achievements

In progressing through the Scottish Junior Forester Award, participants may wish to record their learning in logbooks or keep photographic record of activities undertaken or things they have made. Upon registration a downloadable SJFA booklet will be sent by Royal Forestry Society. There is also an opportunity to enter [Scotland's Finest Woods Awards for Schools](#) an annual competition to reward all that is best in Scotland's forests and woods.

How to request a Certificate

Scottish Junior Forester Award certificates are available to download when you register or can be ordered along with pin badges through the [Royal Forestry Society shop](#). For data protection reasons names should not be submitted. Order the number of certificates required and they will be sent on high quality card ready to be filled out.



Additional Resources

1. Learning Contexts

[Supplementary information on Scottish Learning contexts and themes](#) and links to the Scottish Junior Forester Award.

2. Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland

[Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland](#) – education resources relating to forestry, woodlands and woodland learning, events, local group information with membership and training opportunities, to support the use of Scotland's outdoor environments for learning. For using tools: [Tool Use Guidance](#).



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3. Risk Assessments - [understanding risks](#) by Learning through Landscapes.

4. Scottish Finest Woods Awards – You might be able to enter your school in Scotland’s Finest Woods Awards for school. More information can be found at www.sfwa.co.uk

5. Apps

Build your technology and interpretation skills by using identification apps such as [Zepto Nature](#), [lspot](#) and [lrecord](#).

6. Climate Change Education Scotland provides an online resource for practitioners and learners in secondary schools to support learning and teaching about [climate change within Curriculum for Excellence](#). This Education Scotland STEM [wakelet](#) features links to projects and resources looking at COP 26 and Climate Change as a context for learning and teaching.



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