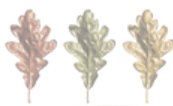




JUNIOR FORESTER AWARD

2025-2026

Revised Edition



Junior Forester Award Leader Handbook

Aims

The 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.

What does it include?

- A programme of at least six sessions in which participants complete practical tasks and enhance their knowledge of woodlands and forestry.
- A course booklet for participants to record and reflect upon their achievements.

What facilities do we need?

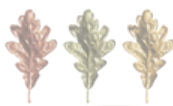
- Access to some trees, preferably at least six different species. These do not need to be planted as a woodland, they can be around the school grounds, in a hedgerow or nearby in the local community.

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

- The award has been designed to make outdoor learning accessible for all schools without the need for specific qualifications although it would be beneficial to have either the Outdoor Learning Practitioner or Forest School accreditation.
- If a school chooses to complete the tool use activities then the staff leading the group must be qualified to Forest School Leader Level 3 or other equivalent qualification which has assessed their safety with tools.

What resources will we need?

- A Junior Forester Award booklet for each participant.
- The participants will need to wear clothing that they can get muddy, ideally a full change of clothes from their school uniform, sturdy footwear and have waterproofs / sun protection depending on the weather.
- Optional resources are mentioned along with each session plan but these can be adapted to suit what you have available, the age of your group and their interest in the activities.
- Optional certificates and badges can be purchased from the RFS shop to present on successful completion.



How do I use this handbook?

The activities suggested in this handbook are just a guide and should be adapted to suit your setting, the age of your children, the time that you have available and your skills and experience.

All of the activities will need to be preceded by safety information relevant to your setting such as an explanation as to where the boundaries are, how you will call the children back if you need them, what they should do if they need you and any risk assessment information relevant to your site.

Remind the group at the start of the session that they should not pick up anything which:

- Is alive e.g. minibeast, other animal unless an adult is with them.
- Is growing e.g. still attached to the ground or a plant
- 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 can have been thrown or pushed through a fence.

Each session is split into different headings to help you select what you'd like to do.

Connecting

These are quick starter activities that either check existing understanding of a topic or introduce a new idea through exploration and play.

Challenging

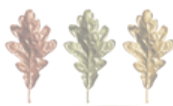
These activities are designed to get your group thinking or developing new skills. Choose from the range available to suit your group.

Consolidating

Can they apply the new knowledge or skills that they have learned in this theme?

Going Further

Any of the themes could be explored in a single session but could also be developed into a full unit of work. You could try out some of these ideas to extend your group's learning.



Session 1: Managing Risk

Leader's note: It's 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.

Resources

Site risk assessment, risk flags or triangle warning signs, possibly gloves and gardening tools.

Connecting

Questions for discussion:

What risks do they think there are in the forest? How should they stay safe?
Why does a forester need to ensure his forest is safe?

Challenging

Can they use cones or warning signs to identify hazards in their forest? What is the risk that they have identified and what control measures are they going to put in place?

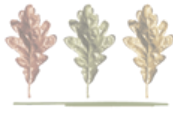
Can they balance out the benefits of an activity against the risk? What about probability?

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

Consolidating

What practical measures do they need to undertake to make their woodland safe for visitors? This might include:

- Clearing paths and then edging them with branches or logs to show people where is safe to walk.
- Laying bark chippings to reduce slipping.
- Litter picking
- Making signs to ask people to take their litter home with them or to keep dogs on leads while children are playing.
- Pulling up nettles or cutting back brambles (if qualified to do so).



Session 2: Tree & Plant ID

Resources

OPAL Tree ID guide or similar, tarpaulins or tuff trays (at least one between 6), means of writing labels

Connecting

Questions for discussion

Which tree names do they already know?

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

Why does a forester need to know the names of different trees in their forest?

Challenging

Depending on the size and variety of your wooded area, how many different types of tree can they identify?

Activity A

Collect as many different types of fallen leaves as they can find.

Bring them back, spread them out on their sheet or tarpaulin. Can they sort them into groups that are similar? What features help us to identify different leaves?

Can they use their ID guides to identify and write labels for their finds?

Activity B

If there are not many loose finds to bring back, can they take an ID chart around the area and see which they can identify?

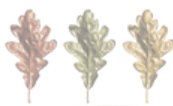
If they have the means to do so can they take photos of the different tree species they have identified and add their own labels?

Consolidating

If you call out the tree name can they run to the correct tree? Can they tell you something about that tree?

Going Further

Could they use these to create a map or their own ID guide relevant to your woodland area?



Session 3: Who lives in a wood like this?

Resources

Pictures or toys to represent the animals who may live in a wood. Magnifying glasses, ID guides.

Connecting

Either laminated cards or a set of soft toys can be hidden around the setting for the children to find.

Which of these really live here? Which should live somewhere else? Which only live in stories? Why have some animals that used to live in our forests vanished?

Why does a forester need to know what lives in their forest?

Challenging

Bird spotting

You might have birds visiting your site that are relatively easy to identify and record. Consider how you're going to identify the more elusive ones though! You might need to build a bird hide or use ID apps to record and identify bird song.

Making tracks

What signs of animal life can you find in your woodland area? At first sight, it might seem as if very little lives there, particularly on a busy school field but there will be hidden clues. Can you find animals droppings, fallen feathers, chewed seeds or nuts, animal footprints or pathways through the undergrowth? You might need to carefully lift some dead wood or stones to see what lives underneath.

Wildlife stepping stones

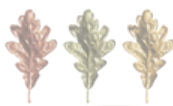
Lay log slices or thick branches in quieter areas of your site as habitats for minibeasts.

Consolidating

I went to the forest and I saw....? Can they work together as a group to remember all of the animals that they might find living in a forest?

Going Further

You could task your group with carrying out a survey of the animals within the site through activities like an invertebrate hunt, using field work skills such as making pitfall traps, and tree beating.



Session 4: Building from Wood

Resources

Depending on your site you may need to find some logs, sticks, leaves etc to bring in for the children to build from.

Connecting

Can the children find 5 items in your area that have been made from timber? Why was wood chosen as the best material for making these things? What might the disadvantage be of making these from plastic or metal?

Or: If your outdoor area doesn't have things made from wood, why not take in a discovery basket with 20 common household or school objects in. Which are made from wood? Why is wood a great sustainable resource?

Challenging

Activity A - Minibeast hotels

Deadwood is really important for providing homes for the hundreds of varieties of minibeast in our woodlands. Can they gather up suitable materials and build homes in areas that won't get disturbed?

Activity B – Dead Hedging

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.

Activity C - Rest a while

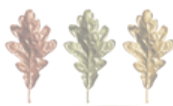
Human visitors to your forest might like somewhere to rest or play. What can they build out of wood for them to relax on or as a play area?

Consolidating

I went to the forest and I saw....? Can they work together as a group to remember all of the animals that they might find living in a forest?

Going Further

This is a good topic to come back to later in the award to evaluate. What impact has the installation of these features had on your site? Have wild flowers sprung up in previously bare areas? Have new species of animals been sighted in your woodland?



Session 5: Woodland Management

Pathway A: Planting

Tree planting season is November to March. This ensures that the trees go into the ground in conditions that give them the best chance to get established and grow into mature trees.

Resources

- Trees, these are often available free to schools through a variety of local and national schemes. Alternatively these can be grown from seed or from 50cm high “whips” that can be purchased relatively inexpensively from a variety of companies.
- Stakes and tree guards
- Gloves
- Spades

Connecting

This topic is ideal for some research before the session. Can they find some statistics on deforestation and climate change? Why do we need sustainable forestry?

What do trees need to grow? Can they collect natural materials to create a diagram which shows all the things that trees need?

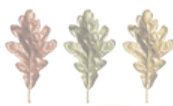
Challenging

You have probably decided where you want to plant the trees before the session but you may want to involve the children in this. The Woodland Trust website “Tree tools for Schools” is an excellent resource to help with your planning <http://treetoolsforschools.org.uk/menu/>

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 with canes where your trees will go.
2. Use an appropriate hand tool to dig a hole for your tree.
3. Place the tree in the hole.
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 and push well into the ground to prevent small mammals such as voles from getting underneath to eat the base of your tree.

Consolidating

How are they going to care for their trees in the future? Will they need watering? Who will be responsible for checking on them?



Pathway B: Tool Use

If a school chooses to complete the tool use activities then the staff leading the group must be qualified to Forest School Leader Level 3 or other equivalent qualification which has assessed their safety with tools. This handbook does not provide guidance on the safe use of tools.

Resources

Appropriate tools
Protective equipment

Connecting

Your group are foresters wanting to improve their forest. Can they identify any trees that might need removing, pruning or coppicing?

Are they:

- Too close to another tree?
- Diseased or damaged?
- In an area where you want to create a clearing as a habitat for wildlife or for leisure uses?
- A tree that has self seeded in your forest and you do not wish to encourage?
- Ready for coppicing

Challenging

Use chalk to mark the trees that you have decided will need work on so that you can review your decisions before using any tools.

Decide as a group whether the planned tool use will be beneficial to your site.

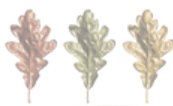
Carry out the planned works.

Consolidating

How can they use the wood that has been cut?

Are there ways that it could be used to enhance your woodland ecosystem or to enhance facilities for human visitors?

Might it provide a sustainable resource for crafts that could then be sold at a school fair or given as gifts?



Session 6: Forestry Ambassadors

Resources

None

Connecting

There is a great research opportunity here, what forests do your children have in their local area? How many different reasons can they find for why people like to visit a forest?

You may wish to bring along some objects and see if your group can explain a connection between it and leisure visits to a forest e.g. a cycling helmet, a pair of binoculars or some climbing rope.

Challenging

Activity A The Little Forest

What leisure facilities would they provide for the public if they were a forest manager? Can they create a miniature model of a forest park using materials found in your woodland?

Activity B Welcoming Visitors

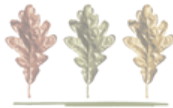
Can they use the knowledge of their site that they have built up through the course of the programme to practice giving each other tours of the forest area and explaining its features?

Consolidating

Once they've practiced can they invite real visitors to the woodland area and show them what they have been doing?

Going Further

Can they write their own woodland management plan to agree the ongoing tasks that may need doing in their forest once the Junior Foresters programme is completed?



Recognising Their Achievements

As your group progress through the Junior Forester Award they should record their learning in their log books. They may also wish to keep photos of activities they have undertaken or things they have made.

Junior Forester Award certificates will be emailed to you when you register or can be ordered along with pin badges through the RFS shop. For data protection reasons we do not ask for children's names to be submitted to us, just order the number that you require and we will sign them and send them out to you on high quality card ready for you to fill out.



JUNIOR FOREST AWARD

SKILL

I CAN IDENTIFY RISKS IN A FOREST AND IMPROVE A SITE FOR OTHERS TO USE.

EVIDENCE

DATE & ADULT SIGNATURE

SKILL

I CAN BUILD AN ITEM FROM WOOD TO ENHANCE MY SITE.

EVIDENCE

DATE & ADULT SIGNATURE

PLANTING

SKILL

I CAN IDENTIFY AT LEAST 6 TREES IN MY SITE.

EVIDENCE

DATE & ADULT SIGNATURE

SKILL

I CAN SAFELY USE TOOLS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF MY SITE.

EVIDENCE

DATE & ADULT SIGNATURE

I CAN IDENTIFY AND IMPROVE MINIBEAST AND ANIMAL HABITATS IN MY SITE.

I CAN EXPLAIN THE FEATURES OF MY SITE TO A VISITOR.

What have you enjoyed most doing Junior Foresters?

What have you learned?

Ever thought about forestry as a career?
More information at: [RFS Careers](#)

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JUNIOR FORESTER AWARD

NAME:.....

CLASS/GROUP:.....

RFS
ROYAL FORESTRY SOCIETY



JUNIOR FOREST AWARD

TOOLS

SKILL

EVIDENCE

**DATE &
ADULT
SIGNATURE**

**I CAN IDENTIFY
RISKS IN A FOREST
AND IMPROVE A
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**I CAN IDENTIFY AT
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SKILL

EVIDENCE

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**I CAN BUILD AN ITEM
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JUNIOR FORESTER AWARD

NAME:.....

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