Learning About Forests (LEAF)
2023 handbook
Introduction to LEAF

Keep Scotland Beautiful manages Learning About Forests in Scotland on behalf of the Foundation for Environmental Education. It is one of the education programmes we offer which forms part of our Climate Action Schools framework.

This handbook contains all the information you need to complete a LEAF award. Further information and examples for your setting, can be found on our LEAF webpages. It is provided here as a handy guide that can be accessed offline.

LEAF Aims
The key aims of the LEAF programme are to:
- Reconnect children and young people with natural environments.
- Promote and expand outdoor education.
- Improve knowledge of forest-based ecosystems.

In completing these aims, children and young people should gain a deeper understanding of the natural world and a desire to protect it.

LEAF programme outline
The steps of the programme are as follows:

1. Register as a LEAF establishment and complete our LEAF coordinator survey. (See Getting started with LEAF page 3).

2. Work through the steps of the Forest Cycle.

3. Complete and submit your Award application by 31st July.

4. Receive your LEAF Award.

5. Start new Forest Cycle.
Getting started with LEAF

Availability and funding
LEAF is open to all schools and nurseries in Scotland. There is no charge for a school or nursery to take part in LEAF. The LEAF programme is funded by the Scottish Government.

Programme length
LEAF is an annual award, following the school year. The programme starts in August and applications can be submitted from June onwards.

Relationship to Eco-Schools
LEAF can be completed as a standalone award, or as part of an Eco-Schools Green Flag award. If you are using LEAF as part of your Eco-Schools application, LEAF can be counted as up to three actions (one topic).

Staff responsibilities
You will need to select a member of staff to act as LEAF coordinator. The LEAF coordinator’s roles are to be the main point of contact between Keep Scotland Beautiful and your establishment for LEAF, support pupils as they complete the required parts of the programme and submit the award application once it is complete. The LEAF coordinator does not need prior experience of outdoor learning or nature-based education.

Staff time commitment for LEAF will depend on your individual setting. We aim for the programme to be as pupil-led as possible, but that will depend on the age range and abilities of your pupils. The LEAF coordinator will need time to spend with the pupils to ensure they are covering all the steps of the programme and time to help pupils complete the award application.

Expectations for completion
To complete the Forest Cycle and be granted a LEAF award, we would expect to see:
- Increased opportunities for pupils to connect with nature.
- This can be in any greenspace you have access to.
- Progress in learning taking place outside.
- This can be within or outside your school grounds.
- Learning about, protecting and restoring forest-based ecosystems.
- This includes tree-based ecosystems in urban and rural environments, marine forests and micro-forests (moss and lichen).

Further details of these expectations can be found in the Action Plan section of our website.

Taking part and registration:
1. Identify the member of staff who will be your LEAF coordinator.
2. Register with Keep Scotland Beautiful as a LEAF establishment via our online registration form.
3. Wait for Keep Scotland Beautiful to confirm your registration.
4. Complete our initial LEAF coordinator survey. This must be completed by 16th October for you to be fully registered for the Award.
5. Get started with your LEAF project!

Training and Support
We have a series of group meetings to support your completion of the LEAF Award. Please visit our training page to see details of the meetings and to register to attend. All meetings take place at 4pm and are recorded for those who are not able to make it on the day.
The Forest Cycle

To gain your LEAF award, you need to complete each part of the Forest Cycle. Please note, the order of the Forest Cycle can be changed to suit your setting, provided all steps are covered. There is a lot of flexibility in how you meet the requirements of the award. If you are unsure about how to cover any aspect of the award, please contact us leaf@keepscotlandbeautiful.org.

A summary of the Forest Cycle can be seen here. Details of how to complete each part of the cycle can be found below and in our LEAF How to Guide online.

- **Forest Committee**: Pupils who will coordinate your LEAF project. The committee can be any size and include any age range.

- **Awareness Survey**: Conduct a survey to find out how connected your school / nursery is to nature.

- **Action Plan**: Choose a theme for your LEAF journey. Use your theme and the results of your Awareness Survey to write your Action Plan. You must submit a draft of your Action Plan for feedback by 30th November 2023 to check if you are on the right track.

- **Inform and Involve**: Start working on your actions. Make sure to involve people outside of your establishment in your LEAF work.

- **Forest Code**: Create a code that promotes your actions and vision based on what you have learned.

- **Check Progress**: It's time to look back on your journey to see how you got on. Repeat your Awareness Survey and review your Action Plan to identify if you have achieved your aims. What worked well and what would you like to do next time?
Forest Committee
Your Forest Committee will be the leaders of your LEAF journey. They will be responsible for coordinating your LEAF actions and communicating your LEAF message to your establishment and wider community. The committee can be any size and include any age range.

Staff, parents and members of your local community can also be members of your Forest Committee to help support pupils in their role. The amount of support staff give should be flexible to meet the support needs of your committee members, but we would like your committee to be pupil-led as much as possible.

Awareness Survey
The aim of the Awareness Survey is for you to gather information on your current progress towards LEAF aims in your establishment, with a particular focus on nature connection.

Who you conduct the survey with is up to you. We would expect you to include pupils, but you can also include staff members, parents and members of your local community.

You can create your own survey or use one of our templates.
**Action Plan**

Your LEAF Action Plan is the place where you can keep a track of your LEAF aims and activities. It is also a great tool for checking your progress at the end of your LEAF journey.

Your first step in starting your Action Plan is to choose one or more themes for your LEAF journey.

**There are eight Themes to choose from:**

- Forests and Biodiversity
- Forests and Water
- Forests and Climate
- Forests and Products
- Forests and Community
- Forest Laws and Codes
- Forest Myths
- Forest Creativity and Innovation

Your Theme/s will help you focus your LEAF work on subjects that are important to you. Visit our theme page to help you choose your Theme/s.

Once you have chosen your Theme/s, you can get started on creating your LEAF Action Plan. You can use our Action Plan template or any other format you choose. Your Action Plan should contain your aims for your LEAF journey, how you plan to achieve those aims (your actions), who will carry out your actions and when and how you will tell if your aims have been achieved.

You need a minimum of three actions to qualify for your LEAF award. In addition, to receive your LEAF award, you need to ensure your actions cover the following requirements:

- Increased opportunities for pupils to connect with nature. This can be in any greenspace you have access to.
- Progress in learning taking place outside. This can be within or outside your school grounds.
- Learning about forest-based ecosystems. This includes tree-based ecosystems in towns and the countryside, sea forests and mini-forests (moss and lichen).

More information on writing an Action Plan and ideas for actions can be found on our Action Plan webpage.

Once you have completed your Action Plan, you must submit a draft for feedback by 30th November 2023 to check if you are on the right track. Please send your Action Plan to leaf@keepscotlandbeautiful.org and feedback will be sent to you within three weeks.
Inform and Involve

Once you have your Action Plan, it is time to start carrying out your actions. You need to make sure that you are involving your whole establishment and your local community in your LEAF work. As a minimum, this involves communicating your LEAF work to your establishment and local community. This can be in person or online.

More ideas to go further can be found on our Inform and Involve webpage.

Forest Code

Your Forest Code will help you convey a message you want to share from your LEAF journey.

You can write your Forest Code before, during or after carrying out your actions.

As part of your Forest Code, you could include encouraging people to spend more time in nature, how to protect nature, the importance of forest-based ecosystems to people and the planet, or anything else from your LEAF journey that you want to share.

Your Forest Code can be in any format, including a poem, song, video or artwork.

Check progress

Once you have carried out your actions, it’s time to look back and see if they have been successful. Repeat your Awareness Survey, possibly with the same people you started with to see what progress you have made. How have your results changed since your first survey? What does this tell you?

Next, look at each aim in your Action Plan and identify if it has been achieved. What worked well and what did not go so well? What have you learned from carrying out each action? Consider what you would like to do for your next LEAF journey. Add this information to the evaluation column of your Action Plan if you are using our template or include it in your award application.

Don’t worry if some of your actions could not be completed or were not successful in achieving your aims. Please still include them in your final award submission. Let us know what you learned from these experiences and what you would like to do differently next time.
Applying for your LEAF award

Award application format
Once you have completed all steps of the Forest Cycle it is time to submit your award application. The application can be made in any format you choose. We have an application template in PowerPoint format to help you, but you can submit in a different format, for example SWAY presentation, word document, video.

The deadline for submission of LEAF Award applications is 31st July.

For you to gain a LEAF award you must include the following in your application (also outlined in the application template):

- Establishment details
- LEAF coordinator(s) name(s) and email address(es)
- Information on your Forest Committee
- Details of your Awareness Surveys
- Your final Action Plan
- Information on how you informed and involved others in your LEAF project
- Your Forest Code
- Additional evidence which would be great to see, but not essential for the award:
  - Photos / videos of pupils carrying out your actions / learning outdoors / connecting with nature.

Don’t forget you can use your LEAF work to count towards your Eco-Schools Green Flag application. LEAF can be counted as up to three actions (one topic) for your Eco-Schools Green Flag award. Simply add LEAF as part of your Eco-Schools action plan (you can copy and paste the information from your LEAF action plan or submit your LEAF action plan along with your Eco-Schools evidence). You do not need to submit any further evidence of your LEAF work in your Green Flag application for it to count, provided your LEAF award falls within the period of your Eco-Schools renewal.

Useful links:
- Application Template
- Action Plan Template
Submitting your application
Please submit your application by email to:
leaf@keepscotlandbeautiful.org
There is a 34 MB limit on email attachments to this address. If your application is larger than this, you can save your file in a cloud storage facility such as OneDrive, Dropbox or Google Drive and email the link to the above email address.

What happens next?
Once we have received your application, we will review it and determine if you have covered the award requirements. Please keep an eye on your emails, in case we have any questions regarding your application.

You will be informed if you have received a LEAF award within three weeks of submitting your application.

If you are successful, you will be sent a certificate to say you are a recipient of a LEAF award.

Your LEAF award is valid for one year from the awarding date. At the end of this period, you will need to submit a new award application to continue your LEAF status.

Where to get help
If you need any support with any aspect of LEAF, please contact leaf@keepscotlandbeautiful.org
Or visit our Frequently Asked Questions page.

We will be holding training sessions and support sessions throughout the year. Please see our training page for further details.
Keep Scotland Beautiful is your charity for Scotland’s environment. We work with you to help combat climate change, tackle litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places.