

Winter is a great time to notice wildlife that would not be so easily visible at other times of year. Many plants die back, trees will lose their leaves and many animals are less active, so it is easier to notice the ones that are still there. It is also a great time to notice seasonal changes as autumn turns to winter and then winter turns to spring.

Evergreen Trees and Shrubs

Winter is the best time to notice differences between deciduous and evergreen trees. Evergreen leaves always have a waxy waterproof coat to stop them losing moisture, but they have many different shapes.



Scots Pine is a native Irish conifer tree. Its leaves are shaped like needles.



Yew is another native Irish evergreen. Look out for the knobby trunk, the reddish-brown bark and the leaves that are like flattened needles.



Ivy is a native Irish shrub and one of the most important plants for birds and other wildlife. It provides shelter for nesting and the berries ripen in late winter or spring when most other berries have been eaten. Ivy doesn't have a strong trunk, so it uses other trees as a ladder to climb up and reach the sunlight, but it doesn't harm the trees in any way.



The prickly leaves of holly are a defence against animals like deer who may try to eat the leaves. Holly leaves that are higher up on the tree don't have prickles.

Winter Colour

In winter you can still see some spots of colour. Look out for evergreen branches, autumn-coloured leaves still clinging to branches, lichen on branches or colourful mushrooms or fungus.



Oak trees hold onto their brown leaves all winter and right into spring.



Lichens on branches are very noticeable when the leaves are gone from the trees.



Mushrooms like the Scarlet Elf Cup can add patches of winter colour in the woods.



Even evergreen leaves like ivy sometimes have bright colours during the winter.

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Gorse can flower almost all year round and is often found flowering in winter.



Some garden varieties of heather flower in wintertime.



We have many types of willow trees in Ireland and some start to flower in January. Look out for the flower buds opening.



Primroses can often be found flowering in woodlands from January on.



Lesser Celandine is another woodland plant that can flower from January on.

Signs of Spring

As winter comes to an end, you can start looking out for signs of spring. Some native trees such as elder start to come into leaf in January. Keep a look out in your garden or look at the trees you pass while out walking and see if you can spot changes as they occur. Check out our Spring Diary challenge for some ideas. If you live on a farm, you can help the National Biodiversity Data Centre record some of the signs of spring using the Farmer's Wildlife Calendar at <https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/>

Birds

At other times of year, we may hear the birds singing and see them flying around but winter is often a good time to see them up close, especially if they come into our gardens to feed. We can help the birds in winter by putting up bird feeders and keeping cats indoors early in the morning and late in the evening when birds are feeding. We can help even more by making our gardens wildlife friendly.



Frogs spawning.



Elder buds bursting in January.



Blue tit on feeder.

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 activity sheets brought to you by Carlow Sports Partnership in collaboration with the Carlow County Council Keep Well Campaign, Carlow Mental Health Association, Healthy Carlow & Carlow Tourism.