

## Birdwatching! A great way to get out and enjoy nature close to home. But what is it?

We all have an innate curiosity for things that are different. This is especially true when we think of the natural world. Nature and wildlife is all around us in the outdoors and just being present in the moment outside will make you more aware of what is around you. You will begin to notice wildlife everywhere, especially birds.

Have you ever wondered what that strange bird is in your garden? Or what that unusual bird is that you saw when out on your walk? Maybe you have been intrigued by a colourful dash of orange and blue whizzing past as you walk along a local river. Is there a bird you always come across but you are not sure what it is?

Birdwatching is a fantastic way of connecting with the natural world. Through birds we can see the changes in the seasons. Winter is a time when we get more birds in our gardens and visitors from overseas to our countryside. Why not look a little closer and find out what birds are in your garden, on the local farm or down at the river?

### Garden Birds

If you are lucky enough to have a garden you may already be aware of the birds visiting it. But why not try identify the species you encounter? Most people know the Robin. See if you can find a Blackbird, Song Thrush, House Sparrow, Collared Dove, Chaffinch, Greenfinch or the beautifully marked Goldfinch. Those with mature gardens may be able to find the handsome Bullfinch.



## Farmland Birds

When out for a local walk on country roads or farmland there is the chance to see even more types of birds. Look out for the Yellowhammer, Stonechat, Skylark and winter thrushes such as Fieldfare and Redwing on grassland. If you are lucky enough you may encounter the national bird of Ireland, the colourful Lapwing.



Stonechat



Redwing



Lapwing

## Water Birds

Rivers, lakes and even small ponds will attract different birds to those in your garden. The Kingfisher is a striking blue and orange coloured bird that fishes in slow moving rivers. The Grey Wagtail has lovely yellow markings while the Grey Heron may be stalking for fish from the water. Look for Mallard, Moorhen and Little Grebe on still waterbodies.



Grey Heron



Moorhen



Mallard



If you need help identifying a bird why not try out the BirdWatch Ireland website <https://birdwatchireland.ie/>

All images © Pádraig Webb

**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](http://www.hse.ie) and [www.health.gov.ie](http://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.

You can enjoy a leisurely audio walking tour that takes 1hr 30mins and has 25 points of interest along the way.

Start by downloading the app Tours Carlow from the Play Store on your smartphone.

<https://bit.ly/3aAwZp5>

You can click on the many tours of Carlow Town and county this app has to offer. Today we are promoting the urban walk for those living in Carlow Town.

This app was developed jointly by Carlow County Council and Carlow Tourism and now is the perfect time to stay local and explore what is on your doorstep.

To view maps of County Carlow visit <https://carlowtourism.com/maps/>

## *An insight to your town*

In Carlow town the walker is presented with a rich tapestry of history dating back to a millennium and beyond, many associated famous names and an architectural heritage telling the story of the town's evolution since the Normans first came here in the twelfth century. With a population of over 20,000, Carlow is the County town and gateway to the South-East standing at the confluence of the Barrow and Burrin rivers.

Tradition has it that the junction of the two rivers once covered such a large area of ground that a lake was formed, or, as some believe four lakes, hence the name Ceatharlach or City of Four Lakes.

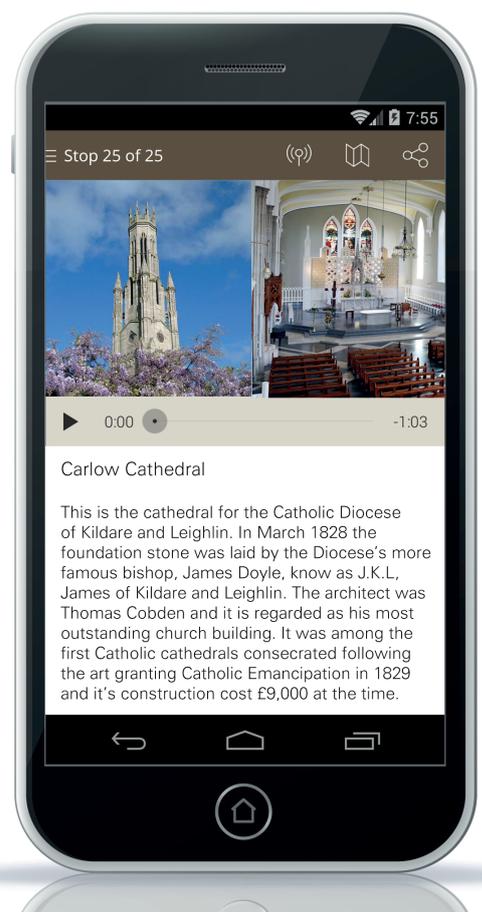
As a strategic river crossing, the town was the scene of a number of important battles and the Anglo Normans signalled its importance by building the great Carlow Castle in the 13th century.

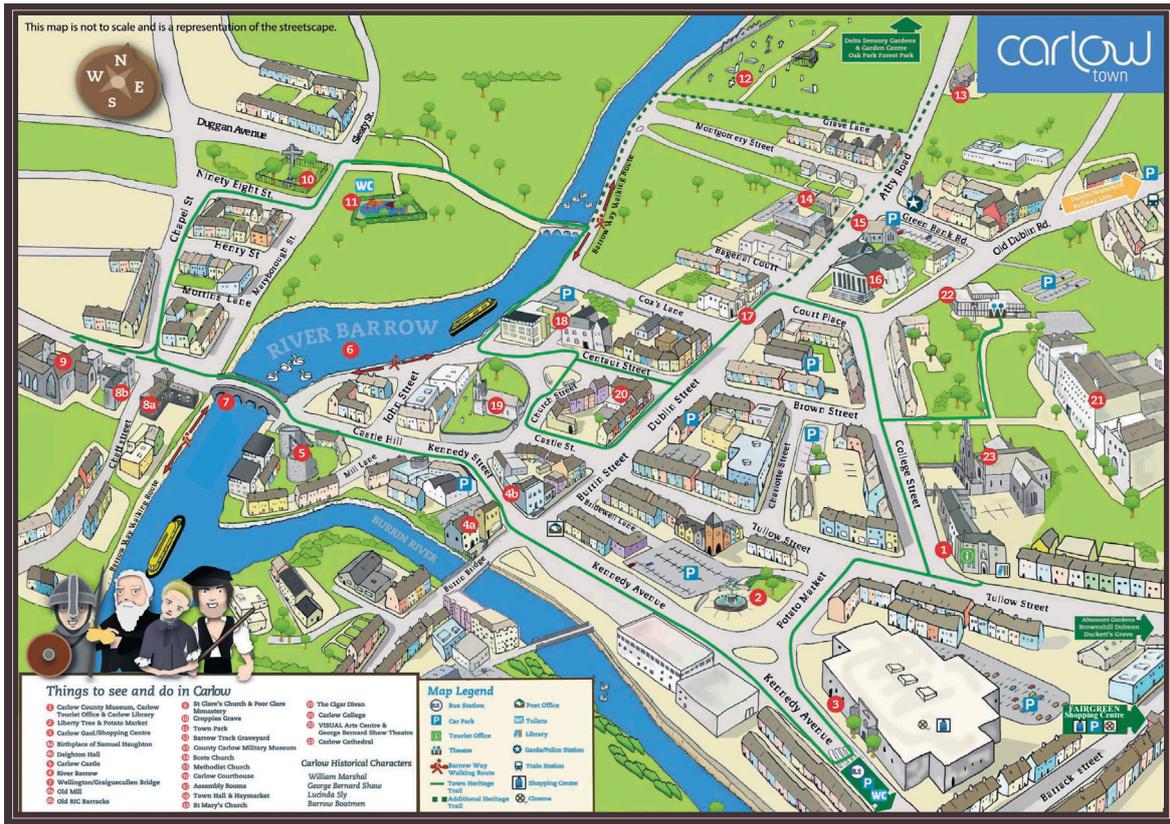
Famous names associated with Carlow include George Bernard Shaw, the dramatist and critic whose mother Lucinda Elizabeth Gurley was born in Carlow.

The famous impressionist artist Frank O'Meara was born at 37 Dublin Street on March 30th, 1853, sharing that birth date with Vincent Van Gogh.



**Stay in your local area.**  
**Stay Safe and in your family bubble.**  
**Go explore while adhering to government restrictions.**





**1 Carlow County Museum, Carlow Tourist Office and Carlow Library**  
The museum brings to life the story of Carlow's development through the ages. Items on display include the original gallows trapdoor from Carlow Gaol used to execute Lucinda Sly for murdering her husband in 1835; the smoking pipe of Captain Myles Keogh of the 7th US Cavalry who died at the Battle of Little Big Horn; read about John Tyndall, a 19th century scientist who discovered the greenhouse effect. The building also houses the Tourist Office, the County Library and Archive. [www.carlowtourism.com](http://www.carlowtourism.com)

**2 The Potato Market and Liberty Tree**  
Carlow was a market town around which areas developed reflecting the goods traded there, like the Potato Market, Coal Market, Butter Market and Haymarket. The Potato Market was the scene of a massacre of over 600 rebels and civilians following an unsuccessful attack on the town by the United Irishmen, known as the Battle of Carlow during the 1798 Rebellion. The Liberty Tree sculpture designed by John Behan, commemorates the 1798 Rebellion and was unveiled in 1998 to commemorate the bi-centenary.

**3 Carlow Gaol**  
This was the town Gaol for much of the 19th century. It was home for most of the 20th century to Thompson's Engineering Works and is now Carlow Shopping Centre. The main gate of the Gaol used local granite to give an impression of great strength and solidity. Immediately inside the main entrance is the substantial Governor's House, a three-bay, three-storey building. The last woman to be publicly hanged in the Gaol was Lucinda Sly who along with her servant had murdered her husband in 1835.

**4a Birthplace of Samuel Haughton**  
Born in Carlow December 1821, Rev. Samuel Haughton, Trinity College, was an Irish scientist who invented 'Haughton's Drop'. In 1866 Samuel developed a more humane method for execution by hanging, whereby the neck was broken at the time of the drop, so that the condemned person did not slowly strangle to death. His birthplace is marked by a plaque. The building is now in private ownership.

**4b Deighton Hall**  
This building was the County Courthouse and seat of the Grand Jury until the early 1830s. In 1809 local businessman Joseph C. Deighton presented this building to St Mary's Parish for use as a Parochial Hall. The prisoner holding cells were located in the basement with direct access to the courtyard and Lucinda Sly was tried here for the murder of her husband. Leading from Deighton Hall is the remaining section of Bredwell Lane which ran to the Carlow Gaol.

**5 Carlow Castle**  
Located at the meeting of the Rivers Barrow and Barrin, the castle had four 25 feet thick towers and stood three storeys high, making it a strategic fortress which protected the river crossing and Carlow Town. It was built in the 13th century by William Marshal Earl of Pembroke and Lord of Leinster, who had succeeded Strongbow, leader of the Norman invasion of Ireland. From 1391 to 1395 the Exchequer and Court of Common Pleas were located in and around the Castle, thus making Carlow the capital of Ireland for this period. It remained relatively unscathed until 1814 when Dr Middleton accidentally blew it up during works to convert it into a modern mental hospital, with only the west wall and two towers surviving.

**6 The River Barrow**  
The River Barrow is Ireland's second longest river flowing for 192km from the Slieve Bloom Mountains to the sea. For centuries the river was used by the large mills along its banks. The Barrow was a significant commercial waterway until the 1960s. Since the demise of river transport, the Barrow 'Loopwalk', which stretches some 114km is popular for cycling, walking and nature spotting.

**7 Wellington/Graiguecullen Bridge**  
Built in 1815, the five arch bridge, was named after the Duke of Wellington. Wellington Bridge is the lowest bridge on the River Barrow and is unusual in that it crosses the end of a small island in the river, and one of the arches, through which the canal traffic passes, is slightly separated from the others. Looking upstream the original canal stones are now home to Carlow Rowing Club, one of Ireland's oldest sporting clubs.

**8a The Old Mill**  
Mills, such as this one, were dotted alongside the canal lock and weir on the River

**8b Old RIC Barracks**  
The Old Royal Irish Constabulary Barracks housed Ireland's major police force prior to Irish Independence. It is decorated with grotesque heads and a plaque of Hercules.

**9 St Clare's Church and Poor Clare Monastery**  
Originally built as St Anne's Church in 1852 and located on the Athy Road, it fell into disuse and was sold by the Church of Ireland in 1927 to the Catholic Parish of Graiguecullen. They moved it stone by stone across the River Barrow and rebuilt it on today's site. Unfortunately funds ran out before completion so the church lacks a spire. The Poor Clare Sisters are an enclosed order of nuns who are devoted to a life of prayer and have lived in the monastery since 1893. [www.poorclarescarlow.ie](http://www.poorclarescarlow.ie)

**10 The Croppies Grave**  
Following the bloody battle in the Potato Market in May 1798, the bodies of the dead were buried here in a mass grave. The croppy was the name given to the United Irishmen after the habit of cropping their hair to mark their allegiance. This site is commemorated with a replica high cross which stands as testimony to those who died to further the cause of Irish freedom from a harsh regime.

**11 Town Park**  
This 12-acre park on the banks of the River Barrow features a safe and secure children's playground and many pieces of public art sculpture.

**12 Barrow Track Graveyard**  
The Old Graveyard dates from 1607 and was the main burial ground for the town until St Mary's Cemetery, Old Dublin Road, opened in 1893. There are a variety of headstones, slabs, metal crosses, memorials and some War Commission headstones.

**13 County Carlow Military Museum**  
The Old Church in the grounds of St Dymphna's Hospital, houses the Military Museum. The museum displays artefacts from the late 18th century and details the history of the Irish Army, Local Reserve Defence Forces, UN Peacekeeping, Carlow Militia, War of Independence and much more.

**14 Scots Church**  
Scots Churches are rare, with only four known to be in existence in Ireland. Designed by architect Thomas A. Cobden, it is a curiously proportioned building with a tall pediment and no windows on the facade.

**15 Methodist Church**  
In 1892, this site was secured as the home of the Methodist chapel. The new site had been used as a quarry so it had to be filled before building could begin. The site was filled by using rubble from buildings being demolished in the town, for each load dumped at the site the carters were paid one penny, so it cost £5 to fill the site. In 1897, building work began and the church opened Friday, April 15th 1898.

**16 Carlow Courthouse**  
Designed in the 1820s by architect William Verroux Morrison, this building is one of Ireland's finest examples of ancient Greek revivalist architecture. The ancient Roman world is symbolised by the iron railings, which are in the form of the Roman axe, the fasces symbolising judicial power. The Courthouse has two large court rooms contained within the impressive granite decagonal shaped building. The cannon is a Russian gun, captured during the Crimean War and commemorates all the Carlow people who fought in the conflict. The Courthouse is operated by the Court Services under the Department of Justice.

**17 The Assembly Rooms**  
The Assembly Rooms were built in 1794 and it is thought they were used by nobility and gentry of the county to host dinners, balls and musical performances. In 1899 the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw inherited the Assembly Rooms from his uncle, Walter Gurly. He later donated the building to Dr Foley, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, to use as a school and in 1923 it opened as Carlow's Technical School. Nowadays the Assembly Rooms house offices for Carlow County Council.

**18 Town Hall and Haymarket**  
Carlow Town Hall is situated on the north side of the Haymarket which was a main trading centre in Carlow. The Town Hall was designed by the church architect William Hague in 1884 and opened March 1886. Over the front door is the iron work of the old gas lamp which in 1891 was converted for electrical use. Carlow, after Dublin and London, was the third town of the British Empire to have electricity.

**19 St Mary's Church**  
St Mary's Church is located in an area of long standing religious settlement, during all the way back to the 6th century. The main body of the church dates to 1277, but the tower and spire reaching 195 feet was designed by Thomas A. Cobden, and added in 1874. The interior retains its original galleries and contains several interesting monuments, including ones of neo-classical architect Sir Richard Morrison.

**20 The Cigar Dwan**  
The Cigar Dwan is the older of only two cigar dawns in Ireland, with a Victorian shop-front featuring elaborate iron panels below the windows.

**21 Carlow College, St Patrick's**  
Ireland's oldest third level catholic educational institution, first opened in 1793, once the penal laws which restricted catholic education were relaxed. The college educated males for the professions and for priesthood, and during 1793 - 2001 over 3,300 ordinands took place. The chapel of the Sacred Heart was erected to mark the centenary of the college but now functions as the College Library. Famous alumni include James Finlan Lator, the agrarian agitator and social activist, the Fenian John O'Leary and Frank O'Meara, the impressionist painter. The 1990s saw the College return to its original role of educating the lay population. Carlow College, St Patrick's is home to the Carlow Art Collection, a permanent public collection of art. [www.carlowcollege.ie](http://www.carlowcollege.ie)

**22 VISUAL**  
Situated in the grounds of Carlow College, St Patrick's, VISUAL presents the in the visual and performing arts. It is a dynamic, multi-disciplinary arts facility featuring four principal exhibition spaces with the main gallery recognised as Ireland's largest and most contemporary art space. The theatre is named after the famed playwright George Bernard Shaw who had strong connections with the area, his mother being a Gurly from the town. [www.visualcarlow.ie](http://www.visualcarlow.ie)

**23 Carlow Cathedral and Haymarket**  
This is the cathedral for the Catholic Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. The architect was Thomas A. Cobden and it is regarded as his most outstanding church building. It was among the first Catholic cathedrals consecrated following the act granting Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and its construction cost £9,000 at the time. [www.visualcarlow.ie](http://www.visualcarlow.ie)



**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](http://www.hse.ie) and [www.health.gov.ie](http://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.

The idea is simple. Find a rock or a stone, paint it with whatever you want, a picture, an inspirational message, something that reflects the nature around you, while out on your walk leave your rock for someone to find or create some colour for your garden or windowsill.

**Join our County Carlow Rocks Facebook group and share your creation.**

 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/457388672295902/>

*#countycarlowrocks*



Material used should be water based to avoid negative environmental impact. Leftover water based (emulsion) paints are ideal. Why not check out what is lurking in your shed or organise to swap colours with a friend or neighbour?

### *Finding rocks/stones for painting.*

You can explore your garden or keep an eye out on your walk for rocks and stones with unusual shapes and smooth textures, but please remember, larger rocks and stones tend to be the habitats or homes of Invertebrates or creepy crawlies and it is important to leave these in place to support our environment and biodiversity.



- Local Garden centres sell bags of decorative stones.
- Smooth stones are easiest to paint on.
- Rocks /stones should be small enough to carry in your hand or pop into your pocket.

### *Day. 1*

- Select and wash your stones & when they are dry, apply your base coat.
- Rocks/stones often need a base coat or undercoat to start with.
- Remember... the paint needs to dry so store your completed pieces somewhere warm and dry.
- We all have, or know someone who has gallons of crème, white or grey emulsion paint in the shed. Ask your neighbours or friends to donate their unused paints or have a rummage in your own shed or garage and reuse what is there.
- You can use old yoghurt pots or any plastic container to hold and mix your paints in. These can be reused many times and when you are finished, wash them out and pop them in your recycling bin.



### *Day. 2*

- Select your message or image to paint on the rock or stone.
- You can find inspiration on YouTube, google images or on Pinterest. These often have simple tutorials too.
- The outline can be done with a pencil and erased afterwards.
- Some designs need to be done in stages.
- Ladybirds for example are simple to do but can need a few coats. Each coat needs to be dry before you start the next phase.
- Some painters use a varnish to seal the colours. Be aware varnish is considered a hazardous material, the same as gloss paint and can harm the environment.



## Creating and Connection

Rock painting can be done together as a family or bubble.

Organise a virtual rock painting party with your friends using Zoom or teams' online platforms.

That way you can share ideas, have some fun and still be safe.

*The rules of rock hunting are simple when you are out on your walk.*

- When you find a stone, take a photo, and post a photo to County Carlow Rocks and use the #countycarlowrocks.
- You can bring it home with you,
- Or leave it where it is for someone else to enjoy.
- or re-hide it.

*If you are rock placing, make sure you:*

- Place your rock in an area that can easily be discovered by rock hunters.
- There are lots of tiny creatures out and about searching for food and shelter in Nature, watch where you walk.
- Post a photo to County Carlow Rocks and use the #countycarlowrocks



## Ladybirds step by step

### Supplies:

- ✓ round stones
- ✓ Water based paint (red, black, white, blue)
- ✓ paint brushes



#### Step 1

Thoroughly clean and dry the stones you find. Paint them with a base coat of any light-coloured paint and allow to dry.



#### Step 2

When dry, apply your red base coat. You might have to apply 2-3 coats to get the full coverage you need. Remember to let each coat dry before you pop on the next one.



#### Step 3

If the stone has a narrower area, use it to paint on a black semicircle for the ladybird's face.



#### Step 4

Now paint a straight black line from the middle of the face all the way to the back.



#### Step 5

Paint a curved triangle on the back. This will create the slight spreading of the ladybug wings.



#### Step 6

Gently dot some black spots onto the back. They can be of varying sizes. Depending on the size of the dots you want to create the top of your paint brush or the top of a pencil can be used for this stage.



#### Step 7

For the face, use a smaller paintbrush, or flip your brush over and use the narrow tip, to dot on white for eyeballs and blue for pupils. Please don't use stick on Google eyes or small bits. Remember, these rocks are for outdoors and birds and small animals can try to eat small plastic parts.



#### Step 8

Be adventurous, Ladybirds can be any colour... just use what you have stored up at home.



#### Step 9

Look for other simple ideas and get involved in. #countycarlowrocks



#### Step 10

Remember to always leave places as you find them. Leave No Trace Ireland have lots of information on their website <https://www.leavenotraceireland.org/>



**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](http://www.hse.ie) and [www.health.gov.ie](http://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.

## What is an Inuksuk

An Inuksuk is a powerful symbol of the Canadian Arctic, a stone structure that resembles a human.

Traditionally inuksuit (plural) have been built by the Inuit to act in the place of messages.

The Inuksuit (the plural of inuksuk) can point the way, express joy, or simply say: welcome.

There are many other meanings associated with the built structure that can be explored such as: to show the correct direction to go, to mark a safe passageway, mark a good resting place or identify a family home.



## What does an Inuksuk symbolise?

Traditionally, they were used by the Inuit in the north as directional markers. An Inuksuk in the shape of a person signifies safety, hope and friendship.

Inuksuit have been transformed into a symbol of hope and friendship that transcends borders to reach people all over the world.



## How do you make an Inuksuk?

- Decide if it is going to be an inside or outside sculpture
- Be sure to wash and dry your rocks if you are using them inside
- You can use craft glue or putty to make your rocks secure for inside projects
- Choose your spot to build your Inuksuk
- Ideal spots for outside are:
  - Your garden, beside your front door, in the woods, in a field, a shallow stream.
- Decide on what rocks you are going to use:
  - Limestone, sandstone or stones you have collected over the years



## Types of rocks to use



**Limestone**



**Sandstone**



## Step by step

### Step. 1

A large flat stone will form the base for the foundation balance.

### Step. 2

Add two large stones upright position.

### Step. 3

Start balancing different shapes on top, most surfaces will be irregular, flip them, position them until they become a better fit.

### Step. 4

Add flat stones for arms as you reach the height you want.

### Step. 5

Weight down the arms with another rock, and another, and another.

### Step. 6

A round rock will complete the top for the head.

If it falls, that's normal, and it will many times until you create the design you want.

Keep going  
build another...



## A Place for your Inuksuk

### The location can reflect meaning

Making an Inuksuk as a marker on our walking route will signal to the next person out walking... what it is you are messaging them.

- ~ Making an **Inuksuk** in your garden may message the onlooker a friendly welcome awaits
- ~ Making an **Inuksuk** in amongst flowers may signify a place of peace and beauty
- ~ Making an **Inuksuk** a pathway may indicate the way to go
- ~ Making an **Inuksuk** in a picnic spot may signify a place of plenty and a place to rest
- ~ Making an **Inuksuk** on a deck may signal a good place to see wildlife



Finally, take a photo of your Inuksuk and send it to Facebook Family Explorer Challenge

<https://www.facebook.com/FamilyExplorerChallenge/>



**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](http://www.hse.ie) and [www.health.gov.ie](http://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.

## What is a seed bomb, and will I get in trouble?

Seed bombing is a type of guerrilla gardening. You throw some seeds into an unloved space, and then disappear leaving nature to take its course. By making seed bombs you are giving the seeds the best chance, and it is far easier (and more fun) to throw a seed bomb than scatter some seeds. A seed bomb in the right place can bring colour and encourage biodiversity in your area. Native wildflowers are best, but you could do this in your own garden or green with pollinator friendly annuals! Make sure you're being a good guerrilla gardener by never sowing weed seeds where someone will have to resort to pesticides to get rid of it!



## The good, the bad and the beautiful of seed selection:

There are lots of different seed mixes to buy but not all seed mixes are created equally. At the side of the box or somewhere on the page it should say what the mix is made up of. Try to get native wildflowers as our wildlife likes them the best! Non-natives might be ignored or worse might push out our native species so that a bee won't be able to find their favourite anymore.

Make sure you are getting the right flowers for the spot you picked out. A woodland flower wants shade and won't like an open area. You can buy specific flowers for your mix to make your own or you can even save seeds! At the moment I am filling my hedges with dog rose, yarrow, spindle and alexanders. They won't all take but it is an easy and fun way to put some diversity in my hedge. It is good to plant these now as the seeds need a frost before they will sprout!

### The Bad

Invasive species

Weeds your neighbour will use pesticides to get rid of



### Better

Native

Different flowering times so you have flowers from spring to winter



### The Good

Any pollinator friendly non-invasive wildflower



### (Simply) The Best

Locally sourced wildflower seed



## Make your own seed bomb

The method is simple and satisfying. I have copied Masanobu Fukuoka's technique except for flowers instead of grain.

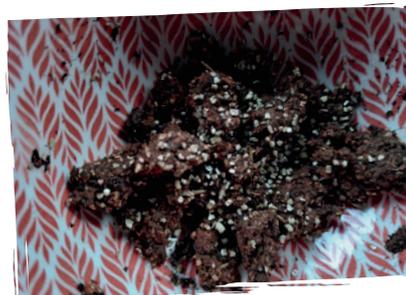
### Step. 1

Mix equal parts of clay and compost. If you don't have clay you can use flour just use it in about 1 part flour to 10 parts soil. Use a pestle and mortar to mix the clay with compost if you need a little extra kneading power.



### Step. 2

Add your seeds and knead through. Think seeds on a biscuit not too many but enough!



### Step. 3

Add enough water to bring it together in a ball. You don't want it too wet because that will rot your seeds or have them sprout before you are ready.



### Step. 4

Then just roll into balls and leave to dry. If you have eager kids, then get them involved in the process and introduce them to creating life in their garden. Enjoy making native friendly seed bombs have fun and stay safe.



### Sources for seeds:

- ✓ garden centres
- ✓ hardware shops

- ✓ <http://wildflowers.ie/>
- ✓ [Seedaholic.ie](http://Seedaholic.ie)
- ✓ [seedsavers.ie](http://seedsavers.ie)



**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](http://www.hse.ie) and [www.health.gov.ie](http://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.

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.

## 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.



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](http://www.hse.ie) and [www.health.gov.ie](http://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.