

The Search is on to Find Ireland's Best School and Community Biodiversity Gardens

An award scheme has been launched to find and recognise Ireland's most environmentally friendly school and public gardens. All gardens that are open to the public or run by the community are entitled to enter as well as gardens in primary and second level schools. The awards are run by Corrin Hill Ice Cream in conjunction with BirdWatch Ireland. Further information and entry forms are available on www.corrinhill.ie.

The aim of the awards is to find the gardens that benefit the environment most by protecting biodiversity. Biodiversity is being lost at an increasingly rapid pace with more and more animals and plants becoming extinct or endangered each year. Scientists warn that the decline in biodiversity will pose a serious threat to people and to the environment as all species are part of the intricate web of life and depend on others for their survival. We depend on other species for food, clean water, clean air, medicines, fuel and building materials.

Ireland along with countries throughout the EU and around the world has committed to halting the decline in biodiversity by 2010 and everyone is being asked to play a part. "We became involved with this campaign to try to help raise awareness of the simple steps people can take to help halt the loss in biodiversity", said Thea Murphy, managing director at Corrin Hill Ice Cream. "The awards are now in their third year and the focus this year is on finding and acknowledging the schools and communities that are actively helping to halt the loss of Ireland's precious biodiversity through gardening. We want to find the best gardens and tell people about them and let people go to see them so that they can learn about the simple steps they can take in their own gardens to protect the other creatures we share this planet with. We hope to see lots of entries from all areas of the country", she concluded.

"We are delighted to be involved with this award scheme again this year", said Oran O'Sullivan, chief executive at BirdWatch Ireland. "The focus for the past two years was on household gardens, we now want to move it to schools and public or community gardens. Protecting birds, wildlife and the plants that give them food and shelter is essential for the survival of wildlife and also for us. Many people forget that we could not survive without our non-human neighbours and we have developed an interdependency with them over thousands of years that our current lifestyles are destroying. We need to learn how to co-exist better with wildlife and plants and we hope that by finding and highlighted schools and communities that are doing better at protecting biodiversity, we will help encourage more to use their gardens and homes to help the environment rather than damage it", he continued. Full details about the awards are available on www.corrinhill.ie.

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Note to editors:

Corrin Hill Ice Cream is made in Fermoy, Co Cork in the traditional way using fresh local ingredients including milk, cream, sugar and fruit. It is a full dairy ice cream containing only natural ingredients and is free from artificial preservatives. It is available in a variety of flavours and packs at local shops and supermarkets throughout the country.

BirdWatch Ireland is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland. Its aim is the conservation of wild birds and their natural habitats. Established in 1968, it currently has over 14,000 members and supporters and a local network of over 20 branches nationwide. It owns or manages an increasing number of reserves which protect threatened habitats and the birds that rely on them, produces several publications dealing with birds and nature conservation in Ireland, and carries out educational and survey work. For more details, visit www.birdwatchireland.ie.

10 THINGS TO DO TO HELP HALT THE LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

1. Plant native or old fashioned traditional plants, shrubs and trees that provide nectar and food for a wide range of birds, butterflies and other wildlife.
2. Cut down on chemicals – use environmentally friendly weed and pest control.
3. Learn how to create a healthy eco-system in your garden it's healthier and will be easier to maintain once established.
4. Go organic – use organic plant food and compost.
5. Grow some organic fruit and vegetables – a strawberry plant or a small fruit tree is a delicious start.
6. Grow your own organic salad leaves and herbs in pot or a special patch.
7. Learn to enjoy a slightly wilder, natural garden and leave seed heads on flowers over the winter to feed the birds and offer shelter for insects.
8. Plant a wildflower bed – it looks wonderful and is easy to do.
9. Put up a nest box to provide a home for birds.
10. Supply water in a pond or birdbath for your fellow earthlings - birds will reward you with song!

Some useful websites:

www.birdwatchireland.ie

www.getirelandgrowing.ie
