

## Learning about Forest Ireland (LEAF Ireland)

### Acorn Growing Guide: From little acorns grow great oaks!

It has been a great year for collecting acorns. We have been distributing them to a few of our LEAF schools, so we thought it would be a good idea to create a short guide to help schools successfully germinate and grow on their little acorns into oaks. Planting, germinating and caring for acorns/ young trees is a fantastic educational experience for children of any age. Here are a few tips to achieve success in your school:

#### Important points

- Acorns can be collected from September through to October from underneath Oak trees
- Acorn can be green or brown when collected. ***It is really important that you keep them damp and do not allow the acorns to dry out!*** Collect them in a bag and cover them with damp leaves until you are ready to plant them. They may already have a small shoot or sprout. Be careful not to damage this whilst planting.
- Put all acorns in a sink or basin of water. The ones that fall to the bottom can be planted as they are full of food. The ones that float can be put back out in the forest or under a hedge in the garden as they will not germinate.

#### Steps to grow oak trees from acorns:



change as it germinates.

1. Find coffee cups/cardboard milk cartons and cut them in half. Wash out and pierce bottom of container a few times with a pencil to ensure the seed does not get waterlogged. Or you are feeling ambitious, you can make a few containers with a "viewing window/panel" in the side by cutting a hole in the side of the container and replacing it with some transparent plastic from a soft drink bottle. Place the acorn right in front of panel and the children will see it

2. Fill the containers with mixture of moist soil, compost, dead leaves, recycle old compost from empty pots and even small quantities of the schools own compost (this must be fully decomposed).



3. Place one acorn (or two depending on availability) in each pot around two inches from the surface. If the acorn has a sprout - make sure not to damage it and place the acorn on its side and gently cover it with

leaves/compost/soil. Make sure to label and date them and record it in your LEAF project. Take photos and draw pictures of the acorns.

4. For the winter these containers can be left the school garden, possibly at the end of one of the vegetable beds. If you don't have a school garden, find a shaded quiet place where they won't get drowned from water from the guttering or won't dry out. It may be a good idea to cover the pots with something, as mice and other such little creatures would be delighted to feast on an acorn (or thirty) in the depths of winter. You can use wire with small holes folded over the pots, slates or stones or some schools have successfully used clingfilm which also stops the soil drying out.
5. It is very important that the soil does not dry out at any point so check pots regularly. If you keep them in the class room to watch them germinate, make sure to put them outside over the midterm breaks and Christmas holidays so that they get the rain and cold. Once they have fully germinated, put them outside so that they get used to being outdoors!

***In order to germinate, acorns need leaves/soil, water/rain and cold of the winter. They get confused and think it is summer if they are kept in the class for too long.***

6. In March the acorns will germinate and small seedlings will be seen breaking the surface. Make sure you put them outside by now! The small oaks should be a few inches tall by the summer time. It may be a good idea to allow a teachers/caretaker look after them all for summer as sometimes sending them individually home with each students does not prove too successful after all the work!
7. In autumn these small oak seedling can be moved into bigger pots or planted into a weed free bed in rows, thirty cms apart and around twenty cms between each tree. Put a 4



pot them on separately.

inch layer of leaves inbetween the rows as it imitates the forest floor and the trees roots will go deeper into the soil. They can stay here for two years before being planted out in their final destination, wherever that might be. Make sure that the Oaks have gone into winter dormancy, (that their leaves have fallen off) when potting on or planting out. If you grow more than one acorn in each pot, the roots can become entangled, so you can gently dis-entangle them and

***'The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago....the next best time is right now!'***

**Good luck with your planting of the future oak forests of the future!**

**From the LEAF Team**

[learningaboutforests@eeu.antaisce.org](mailto:learningaboutforests@eeu.antaisce.org)

[www.leafireland.org](http://www.leafireland.org)