

What is An Choill Bheag?

1. An Choill Bheag is a small densely planted native woodland. It is approximately 20 x 20 metres. One tree per metre planted is planted and mulched by the students.
2. An Choill Bheag is an outdoor classroom, with space created for seating. Over time a nature trail is developed to encourage students to explore and walk through.
3. An Choill Bheag is even more bio-diverse when it is connected to a native hedgerow and they are important as habitats for birds, mammals, insects and wild flowers.
4. An Choill Bheag provides food and shelter for birds and other wildlife.
5. An Choill Bheag will eventually grow into a mature woodland with several layers, including **canopy, understory, climbing, ground, leaf litter and underground layers**.
6. An Choill Bheag can be used as a student wellbeing space in the school grounds, for quiet time in nature.
7. We buy our native trees from small tree nurseries with seed that has been collected in Ireland. This means that the trees are used to our climate and growing conditions. A future project for your school could be to set up a **'Tree Nursery'** to grow locally collected tree seed in the school grounds.
8. Similar tree planting projects are happening around the world, including the **'Tiny Forests'** being planted in The Netherlands and Malaysia. Your school can write a story and take photos of your Choill Bheag and share it with LEAF Ireland.

Why are native woodlands, forests and hedges important?

1. As there is little native woodland left in Ireland, these small pockets of native woodland habitats are more important than ever.
2. In Ireland, we have 12% tree cover. Less than 1% are native trees. It is estimated that there are in total, approximately 709 million trees in Ireland, which is round 154 per person!.
3. We have 220,000 kms of native hedgerows – these are very important as they connect pockets of woodlands, acting like ecological or wildlife corridors.
4. The best time to plant trees and hedges is in the winter when they have no leaves and are bare-rooted (they have no soil around their roots and are not in pots). They are cheaper to buy and should not need watering, as they are planted in the winter months and they are dormant.

What is Mulching?

Mulching: This is when you put a material on the ground, such as layers of cardboard and bark mulch/grass clippings/leaves, as we did in An Choill Bheag. It serves a number of functions:

1. It recreates the forest floor, as cardboard and bark mulch are from trees
2. It suppresses grass competition, as grass is the main plant that will hold back development
3. It keeps moisture in the soil, which means the tree roots will always have access to enough water
4. It creates a habitat woodlouse, centipedes and millipedes, beetles and many other for creatures, wild flowers, plants and fungi.