

Acorn Antics Essential Guide



Introduction

This guide is intended for education group leaders and explains how to organise an acorn collection.

Growing native trees from local seed stock helps ensure that the trees we plant are best suited to local conditions and provide the greatest benefit to local wildlife and woodlands.

To make sure we have plentiful stocks of these native, local trees, we are asking education and learning groups to collect acorns in their local area.

Collecting acorns is also a great way to get more children outdoors, enthuse and teach them about the environment, whilst raising funds for your setting at the same time.

Who's eligible to take part?

Formal and informal education groups based in Wales with a teacher/leader to learner relationship or groups fundraising for their local Wales based education group are welcome to take part.

For example, schools, nurseries, Cylch Meithrin groups, Young Farmers, Parents & Teachers Associations and Scouts etc.

Payments will only be made to an organisation or constituted group and **not** to an individual.

Whilst we welcome community groups, charities and individuals to work in collaboration with an education group and collect acorns, funds will only be paid to education groups.

Step 1: Register before taking part

First things first, find suitable trees

To register your collection, you will first need to find suitable trees - so get outside and explore your local environment to find trees with an acorn bounty.

- Are there oak trees within your settings' grounds?
- Do any of your learners have relatives with oaks growing in their garden that would allow you to collect the acorns?
- Are there trees on public land that you could collect from?
- A group of oak trees of the same species is best to increase genetic diversity.
- Sometimes, due to buyers demand with the nursery we only ask for one species of acorns so your learners ID skills will be especially important – check our Acorn Antics webpage for further information.

Ideally, a site should be sought that is within walking distance of your setting to minimise the cost of transport.

For your group's safety, don't collect anything from trees beside busy roads or from old industrial sites.

Log and record your tree

There are strict rules and regulations to ensure that acorns are traceable from collection to their final growing place in the natural environment. This is to make sure that tree nurseries know exactly where the acorns have come from.

To legally register your acorns, we need you to complete the '*Acorn Antics Registration Form*' and tell us exactly where your trees are located.

Get permission

Acorns are the property of the landowner.

You will need to provide evidence of written permission to collect, remove and sell acorns from site needs to be sought from the landowner and submitted to us at Natural Resources Wales. This could be a copy of an email or letter.

Who is going to help and manage your collection?

Nominate someone to be the main contact for the collection. This person will need to liaise with us and ensure all the necessary information is gathered.

Got permission? Completed your registration form? Contact us.

Once you have sought landowner's permission, please send it to us at:
education@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

We will register your collection and send you some collection sacks and labels. Please allow a couple of days for delivery.

If you do not register your collection, it will not be possible to accept and pay for your acorns.

Step 2: Plan your collection

When is the best time to organise a collection?

The best time to collect acorns is when the acorns begin falling. Ripening dates vary from year to year and from county to county by as much as three to four weeks, making it difficult to advise on actual dates.

Prime picking tends to be late September through to October. Keep a watchful eye on your trees - once the cold air sets in that is the time acorns will begin to drop. The first fall acorns should be discarded if they are not fully ripe – these often fall with the first autumn winds. The main fall is approximately 2 weeks later.

Harvesting should take place as soon as possible after the main fall as acorns will quickly begin to decay.

Enlist help

Acorns could be collected as part of a school lesson or for example during a Brownie group's meeting. Either way, remember, many hands make light work – make sure your group are aware of when the collection will be happening so everyone can get involved.

Insurance

Whether you are collecting on private or public land, consider if there is public liability insurance in place to cover the group should anybody injure themselves?

Want to add education value to your session?

We have a range of curriculum linked, interactive games and activities focussing on trees and woodlands. Why not try running a few of them with your group to give your session context and extend your learners' understanding and awareness of these natural resources? See the ['Trees and Woodlands'](#) section of our webpage.

Step 3: On the day of your collection

Risk assessment

Ensure a risk assessment of the site and activity have been completed and that everyone involved is aware of their contents. Consider the health and wellbeing of your group.

Acorn collecting resources

Essential	Optional
Collecting tubs – e.g. old ice cream tubs, yoghurt pots. Best to have many mobile tubs coming back to a central pot to pour collected acorns into main sack rather than having to move the sack from place to place.	Kneeling pads – acorn collecting does involve spending time down on your hands and knees. You may wish to bring a kneeling pad with you for the comfort of your knees, or plastic bags, especially if the ground is wet.
Pedunculate vs. sessile oak ID guide – make sure you've successfully identified the tree(s) you are collecting from.	Refreshments – although acorn collecting is invigorating and rewarding, perhaps a hot drink and snack will be required to sustain your acorn hunters.
Warm clothes and suitable footwear - cold or wet hands and feet can soon lead to de-motivation and a drop-in acorn gathering rates. To ensure your group is motivated and productive, advise they wrap up warm with plenty of layers.	
First aid kit – in case anyone sustains an injury whilst rummaging for acorns.	
Suitable acorn collecting sacks and labels – contact NRW to receive these for free.	
Wipes or hand-gel - so hands can be cleaned once the collection has finished to avoid the spread of germs.	
Camera – take plenty of photos of your group in action to raise awareness of your group or your fundraising goal. Don't forget to share your experience and tag your photos via #AcornAntics if you have got permission to take and share photos.	
Risk assessment – make sure you've got a copy of your risk assessment with you in case conditions change on the day.	
Education activities – don't forget to print off and take our suggested seed dispersal and seed germination activities with you.	
Helpers – many hands make light work. Make sure you enlist as many helpers as you can.	

Acorn collecting rules

Do...	Don't...
Collect big - The bigger the acorn, the larger its food reserve therefore it will grow into a bigger tree more quickly.	Don't collect nibbled or insect damaged acorns - If there is any evidence that the acorns have been nibbled by wildlife or have holes in them, don't collect them.
Check viability - The longer acorns are on the floor, the quicker they lose their viability. A quick and simple way of checking viability is to complete a float or sink test. Put them in a bucket of water, if they float – they are not viable, if they sink they are.	Don't collect green acorns - First fall acorns should be discarded as they are not fully ripe – these often fall with the first autumn winds. The main fall is approximately 2 weeks later and will be brown in colour.
Observe distance - If the site has a mix of sessile and pedunculate trees, you need to have 20 metres between each tree to be able to collect the fallen acorns.	Don't overfill – To reduce the risk of sacks ripping please don't fill your sacks beyond three quarters full.
Take biosecurity precautions – Everyone who lives in, work in or visits the Welsh countryside can reduce the risk of spreading pests and diseases by remembering to ' <i>keep it clean – don't give pests and diseases an easy ride</i> '. For further information and advice check out our biosecurity webpage .	Don't collect them all, leave some for wildlife - Squirrels, jays, mice, deer and badgers will eat acorns. Ensure you leave some behind as a food source to help these animals survive the trying winter months. Some acorns that manage not to get picked or eaten by wildlife may grow on to become seedlings.
Handle with care - Most acorns appear lacklustre and inert however they are living organisms. Handled with care they will fulfil their potential to germinate, grow and develop into healthy plants, whereas mishandling will damage or kill them.	Don't mix - If collecting pedunculate and sessile oak acorns ensure that collections are kept separate i.e. each sack needs to be filled with either 100% pedunculate (red or orange sack) or 100% sessile acorns (green sack). Sometimes, due to buyers demand with the nursery we only ask for one species of acorns; check our Acorn Antics webpage for further information. Sacks of mixed species acorns will not be accepted.
Collect some leaves from your tree – you will need to include some leaves and acorn cups from your tree with your collection, so we can confirm the tree species. Further information below.	Don't collect from trees showing signs of ill health – we don't want to inadvertently spread tree disease by growing saplings from acorns which have originated from diseased trees. Common indicators of ill health are: insects visible on the tree, distortions in leaf size, colour or shape, holes in the bark, branches, or leaves. Other signs include growths on branches, oozing sap and/or wilting. Check the overall condition of your trees before collecting.
Allow your acorns to breathe – Acorns are highly perishable. Once picked, acorns need to be stored in the breathable sacks we will have supplied you with.	

Step 4: Caring for your acorns whilst in storage

Acorns are extremely perishable. They contain a high moisture content and can be killed by drying out. To ensure they have the best chance of survival please:

- **Handle with care** – Handle them delicately and gently as if they were fine china - mishandling will damage or kill them.
- **Keep them cool** – Store your acorns at a low temperature (2°C - 5°C) to slow down the rate of deterioration and minimise fungal growth.
- **High humidity** – Storing acorns in a room with high humidity is preferable to reduce the possibility of them drying out. Keep your acorns away from indoor heating and artificial heat or they will begin to sprout, and the process of drying out will be accelerated.
- **Beware of rodents** – Ensure wherever the acorns are being stored is rodent proof.
- **Let them breathe** – Ensure acorns are kept in the breathable sacks we have issued you with and not in sealed containers or plastic bags. Acorns are living organisms and need to be able to respire. Turn the acorn sacks daily to ensure aeration.

Step 5: Preparing your acorns for delivery

Upon receipt of your registration form we will issue you with:

- Collecting sacks (green for sessile, orange or red for pedunculate)
- Waterproof labels
- Food bags
- Cable ties

Collecting Sacks

Every acorn is valuable, we do not want to lose any that you've worked so hard to collect. Please only fill your sacks to a maximum of three quarters full, we'd rather have to log three sacks than lose acorns popping out of an overfilled burst bag.

Labels

Two waterproof labels will need to be completed using a permanent marker for **each** acorn sack noting:

- the name of your setting in capital letters
- the grid reference for your collection's location
- the species of acorn: SOK (sessile oak) or POK (pedunculate oak)
- how many sacks are there? e.g. 1 of 3.

One label should be placed inside the sack and 1 tied with a cable tie to the outside of the sack in case one is lost.

Food bags

So we can confirm the species of your acorns, please include a sample of leaves / acorn cups including any stalks in the food bag provided. Please ensure the food bag is placed inside, at the top of a filled acorn sack. Staff from the tree nursery will confirm the oak species by checking the sample provided in the food sacks.

Please note, sacks of mixed species acorns will not be accepted as they cannot be registered against Forest Reproductive Material Guidelines and therefore cannot be planted.

Getting your acorns to us

Once you have completed your collection **please book an appointment to deliver your acorns** as soon as possible to the office you selected on your registration form. The sooner we receive them the quicker we can get them to the nursery and in the ground.

Acorns must be delivered between the **13th September** and **25th October 2023**.

Once you have dropped your acorns off, please send us an email to education@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk confirming that your acorns have been delivered. We will then organise their transportation to 'Acorn HQ'.

Step 6: Receiving payment for your acorns

Rate of pay

Although quantity is important we also want to ensure quality. Top quality acorns which have been carefully selected and cared for will have an improved chance of growing on to become saplings.

Unidentifiable acorns, acorns missing documentation/labels or acorns deemed to be of a poor quality will require the investment of additional tree nursery staff time and resources. To encourage education groups to take time, care and effort to pick the best quality acorns and carefully package and label their collection, a variable rate will be paid (see the *Acorn Grading Criteria* on the Acorn Antics webpage).

The tree nursery which plants your acorns and grows them onto saplings on NRW's behalf will assess the quality of your acorns and decide which rate your acorns qualify for. The rates of pay are detailed on the Acorn Antics webpage.

Golden Acorn Award

In recognition of a job well done, a 'Golden Acorn' Award will be awarded to one education group in recognition of the taking time and care taken to collect top quality acorns.

Digital Acorn Award

Learners will be invited to keep an enviro-vlog about their Acorn Antics journey. Whichever education setting is judged to have produced the best enviro-vlog will win a 'Digital Acorn Award' and their Enviro-vlog will be used to market the following years Acorn Antics campaign. See our Activity Plan for more information.

For further information

Check out our [Acorn Antics webpages](#) for further information and resources.

Contact us education@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

- Twitter: @natreswales @_OLW_
- Facebook: Outdoor Learning Wales (closed group)

[#AcornAntics](#)

Alternative format; large print or another language, please contact:
enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk / 0300 065 3000.