

Health and safety information

These guidelines are to assist in planning activities in the handbook.

Outdoor activities

The Great Plant Hunt activities can be done in school or on school grounds, even if there is not much green space. Activities outside the school grounds need planning. It is important to visit the site in advance. Get to know the site and become familiar with locations of telephones (mobile phones are not always reliable), appropriate pick-up and drop-off points and the location of the nearest A&E department. It may be worth finding out how long it would take an ambulance to get there and if there are any access issues for emergency services such as narrow lanes or locked gates.

Planning is key to an outdoor activity running smoothly. As well as the usual logistics of getting children and helpers to and from sites with appropriate clothing and equipment, a risk assessment should be carried out as part of planning, whether inside your school grounds or elsewhere.

Risk assessment for Thinking Walks

These are some of the things you should consider when assessing risk:

General:

- Children should be appropriately dressed.
- Assess the risk of children slipping.
- Assess the risk of children contacting potentially harmful or irritant matter.

Working with plants:

- Close supervision is required at all times.
- Plants are normally harmless but may cause an allergic reaction.
- A few common plants have thorns, prickles or stinging hairs.
- Do not allow the children to eat any plant material.
- Do not allow children to put any plant material (such as berries or seeds) in their mouths, up their noses or into their ears.
- Children should avoid putting fingers in mouths as some plant material is poisonous.
- Children should always wash their hands at the end of an activity.
- Insects particularly bees and wasps may be around plants.
- Any cuts or open wounds should be covered with a plaster.
- NB: The plants in the species guide for teachers and in The Great Plant Hunt Identikit have been assessed to make sure they are not poisonous. In addition to these points, teachers should also consider the following points when assessing risk for trips outside school grounds.

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General:

- The area may not be secure. Please follow government guidelines for ratios of adults to students. Close supervision is required.
- Consider the locations where you will be studying habitats. What are the hazards and how can the risks be minimised.
- There may be moving vehicles.
- There may be water hazards such as ponds, streams or rivers.
- There are likely to be additional trip hazards and an abundance of wild plants such as stinging nettles and brambles. Children should be warned to be alert to their presence.
- Overhanging and low branches can be a hazard.
- Children may need to carry extra water and food.
- Children should wear clothing and footwear appropriate for the weather conditions. Sturdy footwear is more appropriate than open sandals.
- Wet weather clothing or sun hats and sun block should be considered.
- If using a trowel or hand fork to dig up plants, advise children on using the tools with care and the dangers of flicking soil into eyes.

Classroom activities

When undertaking activities in the classroom, normal health and safety protocol should be adhered to.

When working with plant material and soil the following points should be considered:

- Plants are normally harmless but may cause an allergic reaction.
- Do not allow children to put any plant material (such as berries or seeds) in their mouths, up their noses or into their ears.
- Children should avoid putting fingers in mouths as some plant material collected may be poisonous.
- Children should wash their hands at the end of an activity.
- Any cuts or wounds should be covered with a plaster.

Pressing plants and making a herbarium specimen

A few specific points should be considered when pressing plants and making pressed plants into herbarium specimens (as well as the guidelines about handling plants).

- Ensure children don't trap fingers between plant press boards when pressure is applied.
- If using a belt or strap to tighten the press, take care with metal prongs on the buckle.
- Make sure children don't strain themselves by pulling too tightly on straps to close press.
- If using books or heavy items to weight the press, avoid lifting these awkwardly.
- When gluing the plant onto the display sheet, appropriate non-toxic glue should be used and children should be supervised.

Codes of conduct

The Great Plant Hunt activities can be done in school or on school grounds, even if there is not much green space. When studying habitats and the wildlife in them, children (and adults) should be encouraged to consider and discuss appropriate ways of behaving. Drawing up a code of conduct is a useful class exercise before undertaking an activity. The following points should be covered:

- Habitats are homes to lots of different types of plants and animals. Some of them may be very sensitive to noise, disturbance or damage. Think about creatures that might be scared by movement or loud noise, and plants and creatures that might be harmed by trampling and moving stones or logs.
- Litter can be harmful for wildlife. It can smother plants, trap small animals, and harm larger animals that eat it or step on it. Discuss attitudes to litter and devise appropriate solutions. The organisation ENCAMS (www.encams.org) can provide lots of educational materials and ideas.
- It is not normally acceptable to pick or remove wild flowers from their habitat. The plants chosen for this project are all very common. Stress to children that they are allowed to collect for this project.
- There are laws relating to habitats and wildlife that teachers and children should be aware of. For example, it is illegal to dig up any wild plant without the landowner's permission.

Who else to involve

If you are exploring wild habitats outside the school grounds, you need the landowner's permission before visiting, unless the area is obviously open to public access. This is particularly important on farmland. Landowners and other local people may be very interested in what you are doing, and able to help. Genuine community involvement is mutually beneficial, especially in a large project such as The Great Plant Hunt.