



Forest School Handbook

September 2023

Girton Cottontails Preschool CIC • Cotton Hall • Cambridge Road • Girton • Cambridge •
CB3 0PN

Telephone: 07368180771 • Email: info@girtoncottontailspreschool.com

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The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment. Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers. Children will work with tools, play, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at preschool children, where it was found that children who had attended Forest School then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievements.

A Forest School encourages children to:

- develop personal and social skills
- work through practical problems and challenges
- use tools to create, build or manage
- discover how they learn best
- pursue knowledge that interests them
- learn how to manage failures
- build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- develop practical skills
- understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- regularly experience achievement and success
- reflect on learning and experiences
- develop their language and communication skills
- improve physical motor skills
- become more motivated
- improve their concentration skills.

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Girton Cottontails' Woodland Sustainability Plan

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children are taught about an appreciation, respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both the children and adults are encouraged to be aware of sustainability issues of the woodland around them.

Girton Cottontails' Forest School site is on Parish Council/woodland trust land. The woodland was planted in 2010 as a native broadleaf woodland. The species planted are oak, ash, field maple, hornbeam, silver birch, crab apple, willow, alder, cherry and woody shrubs (hawthorn, blackthorn, and hazel).

3 year sustainability plan (Each term rotates to a different site over the course of 1 year)

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Photos to be taken termly or if something new is found.	Continue to take photographs. Photographs will be reviewed using seasonal comparisons.	Continue to take photographs. Photographs will be reviewed using seasonal comparisons.
Signs of footfall will be observed.	Consider relocation if footfall is beginning to affect sustainability of the site.	Consider relocation. Check old site if relocation was needed last year.
Children will be educated in 'no picking' & to respect the environment.	Continue to educate children as new group of children will be attending Forest School.	Continue to educate children as new group of children will be attending Forest School.
Fauna and flora will be noted.	Review fauna and flora, monitor and evaluate.	Review fauna and flora, monitor and evaluate. Re-plant if needed (talk to Woodland Trust).
Observe trees.	Coppicing if needed (with permission from the Woodland Trust).	Coppicing if needed (with permission from the Woodland Trust).
Establish base camp.	Observe base camp (does it get too wet/muddy/hot).	Observe base camp (does it get too wet/muddy/hot).

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Rules of the Forest

- Look after your Forest School.
- Do not pick anything growing. No pick no lick.
- Do not put fingers or anything else in your mouth. No lick no pick.
- Stay within the boundary rope, we don't go over it, we don't go under it, we don't go through it.
- Stay outside the fire circle.
- We don't carry sticks longer than our arms
- We don't climb the trees any higher than we can do independently
- We make a cross and look at the sky if dogs come into forest school

The Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

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Forest School Procedures

Procedures carried out before each session

- A thorough sweep of the site will be done before each session to check for any litter, glass, animal faeces, etc. Any such items will be collected using plastic bags and disposable gloves.
- A written record will be kept of each sweep. This will state if any hazards were found and how they were dealt with.
- Trees will be checked for any broken or dead branches which may fall.
- Check of weather conditions will be completed, if it is unduly windy or a thunder storm is imminent or has started then a Forest School session will be carried out inside the Girton Cottontails building.
- Prepare boundary marker.
- Ensure all equipment is ready from check list.
- If using tools make sure they are in good condition.

Sessional procedures

- Discuss the safety of walking to the site.
- Children to hold a partner's hand.
- Walk to base camp, talking about the things we see on the way.
- Check the number of children present, write on chalk board.
- Sit down ,discuss Forest School rules and any safety issues.
- Introduce activity.
- All children to come for snack using water to clean hands first
- Discuss the session, ask children if they would like to show what they have been doing or give verbal feedback.

At the end of the session

- Pack away, returning the woods back to how we found them.
- If tools are used they will be put into tool bag.
- All boundary markers will be collected in.
- The water containers will be emptied and all litter taken back to Girton Cottontails.
- A head count will be made and checked.

Health and Safety at Forest School

Girton Cottontails Preschool has a comprehensive health and safety policy which was given to you when your child first started and paper copy is always available to read in the front room of the Girton Cottontails building. In addition to this, the below points will be adhered to.

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Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HASWA)

The HASWA outlines the responsibilities of employers or in the case of Forest School the leader and employees. The main considerations relevant to Forest School sessions are detailed below.

Employers must	How this will be done
Tell you about risks to your health and safety	Adults will be asked to read the risk assessments at the beginning of the session
Tell you how to do your job safely	The Forest School leader will introduce the adults involved to the activities and inform them of safety considerations
Ensure that safe working practices and appropriate policies are in place to safeguard its staff and users	Adults will record any accidents and incidents, and review whether they could have been avoided. The Forest School leader will ensure appropriate changes to procedures and policies are made as necessary.
Inform you how to get first aid	The Forest School leader will have a first aid kit and is qualified to administer first aid
Tell you what to do in an emergency	Staff/helpers will be given a copy of the emergency procedures at the start of their involvement in Forest School
Provide you with any protection you may need to fulfil your role	Relevant safety equipment will be given to anyone who needs it
Employees must	How this should be done
Take care of their health and safety and that of people who may be affected by what they do (or don't do)	Adults must actively manage risks by reporting, reducing, or removing them where possible, providing it is safe to do so
Co-operate with others on health and safety, and not interfere with, or misuse, anything provided for health, safety or welfare	Follow health and safety advice given during the session by the Forest School leader. Nobody should interfere with safety equipment.

Insurance

The Children Act 1989 and the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 place a number of legal responsibilities on the preschool. Therefore, Girton Cottontails preschool has insurance cover appropriate to its duties under this

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legislation, including public liability insurance. Responsibility will in most cases, rest with the preschool, but staff will take reasonable care, both for themselves and other people who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work.

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Essential Equipment List

- Register with emergency numbers & contact numbers
- Medical forms
- Mobile phone
- Newspaper
- Matches
- Wet wipes
- Protective gloves
- Sun cream
- First aid kit
- Scissors
- Water bottle with water for drinking/washing
- Sleeping bag/survival bag
- Thermal wrap sheet
- Map of woodland area
- Pamphlet on hypothermia
- Container for medicines
- Carrier bag for dirty/wet clothing
- Emergency information sheet
- Forest School handbook

Clothing List

- Woolly hat/sunhat
- Gloves
- Jacket/waterproof coat & trousers
- Fleece/sweatshirt
- Long trousers
- Spare socks
- Strong shoes/wellies
- An emergency change of clothes and carrier bag for dirty/wet clothing

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Safeguarding

Girton Cottontails Preschool Forest School fully recognises its responsibilities for safeguarding children. All staff and volunteers are responsible for keeping children safe. In particular:

- Ensuring all children have a safe environment at Forest School in which to learn and develop.
- Ensuring we practise safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children at Forest School.
- Raising awareness of child protection issues and equipping children with the skills needed to keep them safe.
- Implementing procedures for identifying and reporting cases, or suspected cases, of abuse.
- Supporting pupils who have been abused in accordance with his/her agreed child protection plan.

Girton Cottontails Preschool follows the setting's Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy. A copy of the Safeguarding Policy (Child Protection Policy) was emailed to you before your child started and paper copy is available in the front room of our building.

Equal Opportunities

Girton Cottontails Preschool actively promotes the inclusion of all children and adults into Forest School sessions, and will endeavour to ensure that the opportunities for learning, development and participation are available to everyone, irrespective of race, gender, ability, religion, sexual orientation or age. Girton Cottontails Forest School will follow the preschool's Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Policy.

Toileting

- If necessary, children are encouraged to use the outside sheltered toileting area . This gives some privacy for the child while toileting

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Transport to Forest School

Girton Cottontails Preschool aims to keep all children safe. Children will be transported to and from Forest School on foot. The following procedures will be followed:

- The group will be given a reminder about safe walking before leaving the meeting area and before leaving Forest School.
- The Forest School leader will assume a position at the front of the line and all children will be asked to stay behind the emergency rucksack.
- All children will wear Girton Cottontails Preschool high visibility jackets.

Use of Tools

Girton Cottontails Preschool Forest School uses the following tools with the early years children:

- Bow saw
- Bill hook
- Potato peelers

The following guidelines will be adhered to:

- All tools will only be used with the Forest School leader and on a 1:1 ratio.
- The Forest School leader is responsible for making sure of safe usage and maintenance of all tools.
- Tools will be kept in a locked Forest School bag and only be removed by the Forest School leader.
- Adult and child size gloves will be available and will be used when appropriate.
- Children will lose permission to use tools if guidelines are not followed.
- Bill hooks will not be swung or used with gloved hands, and will only be used by the Forest School leader.
- Bow saw must have a blade guard on it while not in use.
- Children will be given instructions on appropriate and safe position in which to saw.
- When using peelers to whittle, children will remain seated, have their elbows on their knees and whittle away from the body.
- All tools will be counted back into the tool bag at the end of the session.

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Fire Lighting

Campfires are an important part of forest school and can be used in many sessions.

The forest school leader and all practitioners aim to ensure that all participants in sessions with fires will do so safely and with as little risk to their health and safety as possible.

Campfires will only take place in the fire pit which is placed in the middle of a clearly marked base camp circle. The area will always be kept clear of low branches. The fire pit will be enclosed by logs.

Fire is surrounded by a boundary of at least 1 metre from the fire pit, children will sit around the boundary, when the fire is in use children are not permitted beyond the boundary unless invited by an adult.

Children are not permitted to throw anything onto the fire.

Water will be available for extinguishing the fire at all times, no flammable liquids to be used to light or accelerate the fire. No plastics to be burnt.

All fires must be extinguished at the end of the session and whenever possible all fuels should be burnt off to ash.

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Risk Management

Girton Cottontails Preschool aims to develop children's self-esteem, independence and motivation to learn in a safe environment. In order that these aims can be met, the Forest School leader will:

- Carry out a Site Risk Assessment on the site where Forest School activities will take place termly;
- Carry out a safety sweep shortly before the session takes place which will be recorded on a safety sweep risk assessment form;
- Complete an Activity Risk/Benefit Assessment for every activity to be undertaken at Forest School;
- Ensure all staff and volunteer helpers have read the relevant Site and Activity Risk Assessments prior to a session;
- Move activities indoors/to an open location if, in the opinion of the Forest School leader, weather conditions such as high winds or the threat/occurrence of electrical storms make work outdoors unsafe;
- Inform staff, volunteers and children of potential hazards and methods of working in order to minimise their risk further;
- Involve staff, volunteers and children in risk assessment, as appropriate, as part of learning;
- Ensure legal guidelines regarding off-site activities, such as adequate insurance and parental permission, are met;
- Ensure that all staff, volunteers and children are aware of the emergency procedures for the Forest School site;
- Be responsible for teaching children adequate skills in order to keep themselves safe, particularly in relation to the use of hand tools and fire;
- Ensure children and adults will have access to drinking water during sessions;
- Ensure a 'no pick no lick' policy is adopted in all Forest School sessions, except for food cooked as part of a fully risk-assessed Forest School activity or snack.

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Risk Assessment

Termly risk assessment

Date Completed:

Date reviewed:

Name:

Signature:

Risk identified	Person at Risk	Control measure	Risk when control in place
Walking on footpaths	Children	Adults to walk back and front of the line with extra adults on roadside of children.	Low
Nettles and brambles	Children and adults	Talk to the children about the nettles and how you can get stung by them. Talk to the children about how sharp the brambles can be.	Low
Low hanging branches	Children and adults	Warn children of the dangers, talk about how they can swing backwards.	Low
Roots and uneven surfaces	Children and adults	Remind children to look at the ground, point out any exposed roots and explain dangers.	Low
Eating berries, leaves	Children	Teach children Forest School rules 'No lick no pick'.	Low
Dog faeces	Children and adults	Make sure safety sweep is done shortly before each session.	Low
Dogs off leads	Children and adults	Teach children to stand still making an x with their arms on their chest if a dog comes into Forest School area.	Low

Tools Risk Assessment

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Risk identified	Person at Risk	Control measure	Risk when control in place
Injury with bow saw	Children and adults	<p>Instruction on safe cutting procedures by Forest School leader (child at one end, Forest School leader at the other. Body to left or right of the saw, eyes on saw). Forest School leader only to use bow saw with children. Appropriate ratio 1:1. Appropriate clothing worn, including glove on non-cutting hand. Use bow saw on saw horse. Cutting equipment maintained in good working order. Emergency procedures in place. Equipment counted out and back.</p>	Low
Injury with bill hook	Children and adults	<p>Instruction on safe cutting procedure by Forest School leader. (Forest School leader holding hook arms straight, body back, adult to give child go ahead to bang hook.) Forest School leader only to use bill hook with children. Appropriate ratio 1:1. Appropriate clothing worn. Cutting equipment maintained in good working order. Emergency procedures in place. Equipment counted out and back.</p>	Low
Injury with peelers	Children and adults	<p>Instruction on safe cutting procedures by Forest School leader (elbows on knees whittling away from the body).</p>	Low

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		<p>Forest School leader only to use peelers with children. Appropriate ratio 1:1. Appropriate clothing worn. Cutting equipment maintained in good working order. Emergency procedures in place. Equipment counted out and back.</p>	
Penknife	Adults	<p>Ensure penknife is closed and locked when not in use. Turn safety catch. Open blade away from you. Turn safety catch back on. Cutting equipment maintained in good working order. Emergency procedures in place. Equipment counted out and back.</p>	Low
Secateurs	Adults	<p>Use tool for intended use. Cutting equipment maintained and in good working order. Emergency procedures in place. Equipment counted out and back.</p>	Low

Adult Forest School Medical and Contact Information Form

Adult's full name	
Date of birth	
Next of kin	
Contact number for next of kin	Mobile Work
Home address	
Phone numbers	Home Work Mobile
Doctor	Address Phone number

Have you had any of the following?

Illness	Comment	Medication needed Please specify
Asthma/bronchitis		
Sight/hearing difficulties		
Heart condition		
Diabetes		
Epilepsy		
Allergies: e.g. pollen, nuts, materials		
Have you ever been stung by a wasp or bee? If yes describe the reaction		
Date of last tetanus injection		
Any other conditions		

Signed:

Date:

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Child Forest School Medical and Contact Information Form

Child's full name	
Date of birth	
Contact name and relationship to child	
Home address	
Phone numbers	Home Work Mobile
Doctor	Address Phone number

Has your child had any of the following?

Illness	Comment	Medication needed Please specify
Asthma/bronchitis		
Sight/hearing difficulties		
Heart condition		
Diabetes		
Epilepsy		
Allergies: e.g. pollen, nuts, materials		
Has your child ever been stung by a wasp or bee? If yes describe the reaction		
Date of last tetanus injection		
Any other conditions		

Signed:

Date:

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Safety Sweep

Before each Forest School session ensure there is a safety sweep of the Forest School site to look for and assess immediate risks.

Record below. Put all safety sweeps in the Forest School risk assessment folder.

Date:	Time:	Weather:
Name of Forest School leader:		
Signature:		

Checklist	Yes/No	Comments
Fallen branches		
Low branches		
Protruding thorns		
Brambles/nettles		
Slippery areas		
Broken glass/needles		
Vandalism/intruders		
Weather effects		
Standing water		
Boundary line		
Base camp		
Tool area roped off		
Emergency rucksack		
Equipment ready		
Spare clothes		

Other hazards identified:

Action taken:

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Accident and Emergency Procedure

All staff and helpers will be briefed on what to do in the case of an emergency.

The Forest School leader will assess the situation, the nature and the extent of the injury/accident. If it is a minor injury/accident and first aid is needed the Forest School leader will give first aid. An accident form will be completed and then shown to parents on collection of their child

If anyone sustains an injury or illness which cannot be treated by first aid on site and requires medical assistance the procedure is:

- The emergency services will be contacted using the Girton Cottontails phone carried by the Forest School leader.
- The child/adult's emergency contact will then be contacted.
- The rest of the group will be supervised away from the incident and if in danger will be moved to safety.
- One member of staff will meet the ambulance at the car park.
- If the injured party is taken to hospital one member of staff will go with them and the emergency contact will be updated about the situation.
- All children and remaining staff will return back to Girton Cottontails.

Emergency contact numbers/ important information

Ambulance – 999

Girton Cottontails mobile 07368180771

Postcode – CB3 0PN

Grid reference - TL426624

What 3 words is on the preschool phone

Ambulance access – Once in the car park the ambulance will be able to drive across the recreation ground to entrance of the open field before woodland area. (Gate combination code 4721)

In the event of a dangerous occurrence a RIDDOR record will be created, along with an incident report of any serious near-miss incident at or in the vicinity of the Forest School site.

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Other Emergency Procedures

Lost or Missing Child

Girton Cottontails Preschool's priority is to keep all children safe. If it is discovered that a child is missing from the group, the situation will be taken very seriously from the outset and the following emergency procedure will be implemented:

- The Forest School leader will be informed immediately.
- Activity of the rest of the group shall be suspended in order that another member of staff and the Forest School leader if appropriate may be released to conduct a search which will last no more than 5 minutes.
- The remaining children and staff member will go back to base camp where they will discuss their activities.
- If, after a 5 minute search, the child has not been located, the Forest School leader will call 999 and alert the police.
- The emergency contact will then be called and informed of the situation.
- Staff will corroborate details of the situation, including last known position of the missing child or adult and timings. These will be recorded in the accident/incident folder.

Uninvited Persons

- Challenge the intruder and politely ask them to leave.
- Ask helper to call the children back to base camp using 1 2 3 back to base camp (whilst you are asking intruder to leave).

Adverse Weather Conditions

- If the weather conditions are deemed unsafe the Forest School Leader will move the Forest School session to a safe environment. This may still be outside but in the open field rather than within the trees. If it is unsafe to stay outside the session will take place indoors.
- In the event that the weather changes during a session to an extent that the Forest School Leader feels that it is unsafe the children will be removed to a safe area.

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Fire Procedures

Fire at Forest School

If a fire spreads or becomes out of control and attempts to extinguish it have failed, the Forest School leader or assisting adult will shout "1,2,3 stop". Upon hearing this, all adults and children should immediately stop what they are doing, leave any tools, resources or belongings, and follow instructions given by the Forest School leader (i.e., "walk to name/place" or "walk to me") guided by supporting adults.

Staff will account for the presence of all children and adults, and assemble the group ready to evacuate.

A final head count will be made, and upon all children and adults being present, evacuation will begin immediately, taking the safest (not necessarily the quickest) route. Adults will lead the group swiftly, with the Forest School leader leading and the session assistant following behind the last child. The fire brigade will be called on route. Arrangements will be made for children to be returned to school.

Behavioural Problems

- All trained staff will implement positive behaviour strategies to maintain a safe environment.
- If a situation with a child is escalating staff may use time out strategies and attempt to calm the child.
- If necessary, the rest of the group will be removed from any potential risk.
- When the situation has calmed down the child will be spoken with (if appropriate) and parents informed if necessary.
- The incident will be recorded in the Girton Cottontails Preschool behaviour folder and incident form if appropriate.

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Hypothermia

Children and adults will be monitored for signs of hypothermia during Forest School sessions. Appropriate action will be taken by the Forest School leader as necessary.

Body temperature	Symptoms	Action
Normal body temperature 36 - 38°C		
Mild Hypothermia 35°C	Shivering, cold pale skin	Do something about it! Add more clothes or a blanket, hat and scarf
33°C	Muscle stiffness, severe shivering, Irritability. Withdrawing from the group. Mood changes clumsiness, confused.	Put in a sleeping bag or two Use survival bag Insulate from ground. Keep clothes on. Drink warm sweet liquids (not hot) Do not put close to fire Seek medical help
Severe Hypothermia 28°C	Shivering STOPS Slow weak pulse Slow shallow breath Unconscious Breathing stops Cardiac arrest Coma DEATH	No liquids Monitor pulse and breathing Raise feet slightly Perform CPR until help arrives.

Staffing

Forest School sessions are always led by a qualified Forest School leader. Leaders will have undergone an intensive training programme and will have been awarded a relevant Level 3 qualification.

All staff and volunteers will have a current DBS check in place

Designated Person Responsibilities

Individual job cards will be available for each individual for the session. These are kept in the emergency rucksack and will be distributed by the Forest School leader.

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Forest School Leader Responsibilities

- To comply with the contents of the Forest School Handbook.
- Wear appropriate clothing – positive role modelling!
- To fulfil the role of responsible person for Health & Safety – keeping the children safe.
- To provide appropriate Forest School activities – according to the age, stage of development of the children, season and weather.
- To lead a facilitative group of adults in observing the children and recording those observations in an appropriate way.
- To appropriately brief other adults participating in Forest School at any given time.

Practitioner/Learning Support Assistant Responsibilities

- To comply with the contents of the Forest School Handbook.
- Wear appropriate clothing – positive role modelling!
- To assist the Forest School Leader in observing the children and recording those observations in an appropriate way.
- To assist in keeping the children safe.
- To deal with any toileting issues.
- To assist the Forest School Leader in any Forest School activities as directed, according to the activity, season and weather.

Parent Helper/Volunteer Responsibilities






- To comply with the contents of the Forest School Handbook.
- To wear appropriate clothing – positive role modelling!
- To assist the Forest School Leader and other staff in keeping the children safe.
- To be responsible for hand washing.
- To assist the Forest School Leader in any Forest School activities as directed, according to the activity, season and weather.
- Additional adult volunteers are always welcome, providing they have been DBS checked.

**Girton Cottontails Preschool CIC • Cotton Hall • Cambridge Road • Girton • Cambridge •
CB3 0PN**

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Poisonous Plants and Trees


Ornamental Trees and Shrubs	
	<p>Daphne FATAL A few berries can kill children</p>
	<p>Wisteria Seed Pods Mild to severe digestive upset Poisons many children</p>
	<p>Laburnum Seed Pods Severe poisoning Excitement, Staggering, Convulsions and Coma</p>
	<p>Broom Seed Severe poisoning Excitement, Staggering, Convulsions and Coma</p>
	<p>Laurel (All Parts) FATAL Nausea, Vomiting, Difficulty Breathing and Coma</p>


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	<p>Rhododendrons (All Parts) FATAL Nausea, Vomiting, Difficulty Breathing and Coma</p>
	<p>Azaleas (All Parts) FATAL Nausea, Vomiting, Difficulty Breathing and Coma</p>




	<p>Yew (Berries and Foliage) FATAL Death is usually sudden and without warning symptoms</p>
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Trees	
	<p>Oak (Foliage and Acorns) Gradual Poisoning Affects Kidneys. Symptoms appear after several weeks.</p>

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	<p>Holly Berries Mild Poisoning Vomiting and Diarrhoea</p>
	<p>Privet Berries FATAL Nausea, Drowsiness, Vomiting and Diarrhoea</p>
	<p>Cherry Trees (Twigs and Foliage) FATAL Releases cyanide when eaten</p>

Wild Plants	
	<p>Cuckoo Pint (Roots and Berries) Severe Poisoning Intense irritation and burning of the mouth and tongue</p>
	<p>Greater Celandine (Roots and Other) Severe Poisoning Diarrhoea, inflammation of the bladder, drowsiness and dermatitis</p>

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	<p>Henbane (All parts) FATAL Roots can be mistaken as parsnips. Intense digestive disturbances. Juices may severely injure digestive system</p>
	<p>Nightshade (All parts) FATAL Intense digestive disturbances. Juices may severely injure digestive system</p>
	<p>Hemlock (All parts) FATAL Looks like wild carrot</p>
	<p>Thorn Apple (All parts) Severe Poisoning Abnormal thirst, distorted vision, delirium, incoherence and coma</p>
	<p>Water Hemlock (All parts) FATAL Violent and painful convulsions</p>
	<p>Foxglove leaves May be FATAL Source of dry digitalis Irregular heartbeat, digestive upset, mental confusion</p>

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