



APRIL

SPRING on the farm

NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

FARMING FOR
nature

As the farming year unfolds, are you keeping an eye out for what wildlife appears on your farm?

What flower or bird brings you joy as the seasons change? What can you look forward to appearing this month? What wildlife might be on your land? What more can you do to encourage it and enhance it?

HERE IS A MONTH BY MONTH GUIDE TO HELP YOU FARM FOR NATURE!

This is just a start – please help us create a rich calendar to celebrate and support farming for nature! What have we forgotten? Do you have any useful 'nature hacks' to share? Let us know on info@farmingfornature.ie

Generally, there is lots of good information available for farmers who want to help wildlife. We have many resources available on www.farmingfornature.ie

If you have any queries why not submit them to our **Farming for Nature Forum** on the website and allow other farmers to answer.

NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

SPRING on the farm

APRIL



NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Everywhere!

Care for your soil. It is the basis of everything for your farming produce and productivity. Among the many benefits are:

- Improved soil aggregate stability
- Better infiltration
- Crop and grassland resilience [to drought/flood]
- Reduced weed pressure
- Adherence to Statutory Management Requirements
- Avoidance of pollution issues



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

- Do not leave soil exposed or susceptible to erosion.
- Avoid poaching, pinch-points, trafficking and rutting.
- Nurture the soil and build humus – give back [healthy] nutrients.
- Minimise tillage.
- Add species diversity to your sward.



Bogs

Heathers are native to Ireland and are an important source of food for sheep grazed on Irish bogland.



Keep a lookout for **bog rosemary** towards the end of the month – this is the first of the heathers to come into flower.

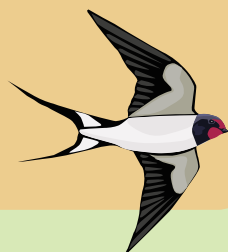


Buildings

Swallows [also called 'barn swallows'] will be back soon.



Allow swallows to nest freely in the eaves of farm buildings, leaving spaces for them to fly in and out. If mess is an issue, attach a piece of wood below the nesting site to catch droppings – make sure to do this before the swallows arrive as interfering with the nest site later could disturb the nesting pair. Once they are nesting, make sure to leave the way in and out open at all times – swallow chicks need feeding **every 20 minutes** from dawn to dusk!!



NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

SPRING on the farm

APRIL



NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Coastal farms

Watch the skies for **terns**, which return to Irish shores to breed in the warmer months.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

The aerial antics and forked tails of tern species have earned them the nickname 'sea-swallows'. These '**sea-swallows**' can live for up to **25-30 years**, during which time they travel more than **3 million kilometres!**



Garden or farmyard

Want to help pollinators? Now's the time to sow pollinator friendly flowers in the garden, or to allow some space where native flowers will naturally emerge. Some farmers are also sowing large patches [the colour of it!] along their drives.



Why not sow a few pollinator friendly flowers along with your vegetables? Borage and calendula work well, although make sure any non-native plants don't take over and escape outside the garden!



Hedgerows

Hawthorn [whitethorn/mayflower] is in full blossom.



With its beautiful blossom and a bounty of bright red fruits the **wild cherry** is one of our prettiest native trees.

In April, hedgerows turn the Irish landscape into a picture postcard with their riot of white flowers. Blackthorn and hawthorn can often be confused. The flowers of **blackthorn** appear before the leaves, and the spines have buds along their length, while on **hawthorn** the flowers emerge from the same point as the buds.

Birds play a role in the tree's propagation by eating the cherries and dispersing the seed.

NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

SPRING on the farm

APRIL



NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Hill pasture

The **wheatear** will be arriving back on its summer breeding grounds.



Look out for the white rump of this attractive little bird.



Pasture, meadows & field margins

Consider leaving an area adjacent to a hedgerow to **let native wildflowers grow**.

Dung beetles are a very valuable asset on a farm. The dung beetles are most active just as the weather starts to warm up.



Fence off an area from April-September just to see what is there? Then let the cattle into the area to graze, compact, fertilize and lightly poach [helps germination of seeds] the ground.

Reducing grassland management intensity can rapidly increase the variety of grassland plant species, helping to restore biodiversity. Newer information also suggests this can limit carbon loss from soil and improve soil structure.

Moths and **butterflies**, **bees** and **hoverflies** will be busily abundant in any habitats with a diverse mix of species.

As silage season begins, think about how you might reduce silage effluent this year.

A greater diversity of habitats, and a greater diversity of species therein, will host a richer fauna. Even the soft rush provides the food plant of day-flying moth species.

Silage effluent pollutes watercourses. If you wilt the grass prior to ensiling [i.e. increase the dry-matter content], this will reduce the effluent produced.



Ponds

Tadpoles hatch and grow from April to May



How many will survive to full grown frogs?

NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

SPRING on the farm

APRIL



NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Streams
& rivers

Flag irises are hardy native perennials that stand tall around streams, rivers and wetlands in spring and summer. Watch out for their spear-like green foliage shooting up around now, to be topped by striking yellow flowers a little later in the year.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

Try to maintain diversity of plant life along the borders of streams and rivers – this is great for wildlife and the different root lengths and structures will help to stabilise the river banks during floods.



Tillage fields

Consider leaving an area: a **margin**, field corner, or a plot within the crop to **let native wildflowers grow**. Select areas carefully to ensure they encourage less competitive plants.



Just a metre-wide grass strip between the outer edge of the hedge and the crop edge can benefit wildlife in many ways. A tussocky grass strip against a short thick hedge provides an ideal habitat for ground-nesting bird species such as **grey partridges**, **whitethroats** and **yellowhammers**.



Wet or
rough ground

Did you know swallows need over **1000 mouthfuls of wet mud** to build their nests?



Creating patches of **wet ground with some soft mud** in April [e.g. a tractor mark or a muddy puddle on the yard] can provide an ideal place for swallows to harvest these precious mouthfuls. If you watch carefully, you may see them carefully dipping dry grasses into the wet mud – nature's glue!



NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

SPRING on the farm

APRIL



NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Woods

Bluebells are starting to raise their heads.

Spring days are often accompanied by the sound of the chainsaw across the Irish landscape! Longer days and better weather tempt us out to 'tidy up' after the winter. However, leaving **dead wood** to stand or lie is crucial to providing habitat for a whole host of species of **fungi**.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

Bluebells take over five years to flower from seed, which means it takes some time for whole woodland floors to be colonised by this pretty purple flower.

Where possible, retain dead wood on site. Fallen trees can be moved and used for erosion control, or placed around emerging trees as protection from grazing animals. Snags (the stumps of old trees) can be left standing in hedgerows or woodlands to provide habitat for a host of birds, insects and fungi.



TIPS FOR THE MONTH!



Climate

Have you considered an **agro-forestry system**?



Agroforestry or **silvopasture** can be used to build a climate resilient farm system. Many combinations are possible, from simply providing extra food for livestock by planting edible trees, to multi-cropping cash crops with fruit trees, to running pigs and poultry amongst a timber crop. **The more diverse the system, the more resilient** it will be to increased droughts or floods – and the diversity is great for wildlife too!

NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

SPRING on the farm

APRIL



TIPS FOR THE MONTH!



Pollinators

Look out for the red haired **tawny mining bee**, which emerges from hibernation in April.



On a sunny day, why not try the All Ireland Pollinator Plan '10 minute timed flower count'? It's a great way to learn more about which pollinators are visiting your farm, while also contributing towards conservation research as a citizen scientist. Have a look at www.pollinators.ie for more info and detailed video instructions!

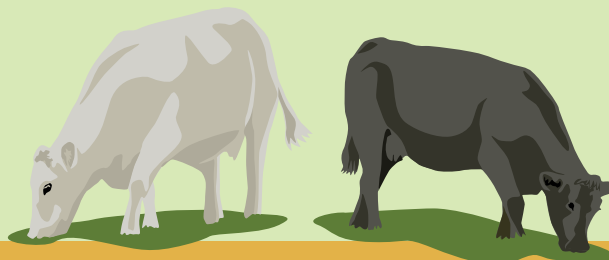


Water quality

If you are using chemical fertilisers, have you made the switch to **protected urea**?



Nitrogen fertilisers move freely through the soil. As such, they are very susceptible to leaching into watercourses. This fertiliser run-off is harmful to the environment, as well as being expensive for farmers. Protected urea converts nitrogen to an ammonium form, which is **less prone to leaching** and which is then slowly released to plants as nitrogen. As a result, it's both better for nature and less wasteful for the farmer



NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

SPRING on the farm

Farming For Nature offers best practice guidelines and actions for different land types.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE GO TO www.farmingfornature.ie



To investigate what native species you have or could encourage on your land there are plenty of sources to help:

FOR NATIVE FLOWERS - YOU CAN SEARCH BY FLOWERING MONTH, COLOUR OR HABITAT

www.irishwildflowers.ie

FOR NATIVE TREES SEE HERE - IT WILL GIVE YOU ADVICE ON DIFFERENT TREES

www.treecouncil.ie

FOR NATIVE BIRDS SEE HERE

www.birdwatchireland.ie

FOR NATIVE BUTTERFLIES SEE HERE

www.irishbutterflies.com

FOR A COMPLETE BREAKDOWN OF ALL IRISH SPECIES, THE NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY DATA CENTRE IS THE KEY SOURCE. IF YOU WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO CITIZEN SCIENCE YOU CAN JOIN THE FARMERS WILDLIFE CALENDAR CLIMATE TRACKER BY RECORDING AND SUBMITTING YOUR SPECIES THROUGH THE BIODIVERSITY DATA CENTRE

www.biodiversityireland.ie



c/o Burrenbeo Trust

Glebe Road Kinvara Co.Galway

info@farmingfornature.ie

www.farmingfornature.ie

Follow us on



Subscribe to our channels on



This leaflet has been jointly supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

