

Ark Instructions for public and commercial land



Why would you want to jump on board the ARK project?

Simply put, it is a positive movement to attach yourself to, one that grows your green image, requires very little input and reduces your costs. It's a win – win situation!

There is a wave of awareness growing worldwide that we need to change our land-use policies and expediently become more supportive of nature and step into line with climate change strategies. Goodwill is the harvest from coming on board this Ark re-wilding concept.

By re-wilding roadside verges, derelict land, industrial estates and large areas of parks that are unused, you are becoming part of the solution and set a very positive example. If local councils could even leave the roadside verges grow all year and if necessary for safety only cut them once in the autumn, this would be a massive help for the pollinators. Other areas that do not impact on road safety could be left to recover permanently.

By marking out areas as “Arks”, it would save a lot of money by reducing the maintenance

costs incurred to keep everything neat and tidy.

Shifting Baseline Syndrome

Every generation has less and less awareness of what truly healthy living landscapes actually look like. People don't realise, for example, that the bare grassy hillsides are not supposed to be bare, that they are over grazed and support almost no life other than sheep. They don't know what a diverse native woodland looks like, or that a variety of life depends on them. They are accustomed to seeing stands of monoculture non-native, much poisoned, conifer plantations, which are dark and dead underneath for the most part.

People don't remember what it was like to have shoals of fish in the rivers, to have crystal clear seas cleaned by the massive beds of oysters, to have oodles of birds, insects, frogs, butterflies, hedgehogs, etc. sharing our land. It is so quiet now. Eerily quiet. When you're driving at night your windscreen is no longer covered in dead insects and moths like it used to be when you were a small child. As a species, we immediately forget what is lost and only see what exists right here, right now as the new normal. Every generation is experiencing huge shifts in what passes for a natural system. These changes have become more extreme over the last few generations. What we see as dead landscapes, our kids will see as natural and normal. There is a phrase for this and most of us these days suffer from it. It's called *'Shifting Baseline Syndrome'*.

"Generational amnesia is when knowledge is not passed down from generation to generation. For example, people may think of as 'pristine' wilderness, the wild places that they experienced during their childhood, but with every

generation this baseline becomes more and more degraded” Dr. E.J. Milner-Gulland

THE STEPS TO BUILDING AN ARK

Step 1. Make it clear that this land has a purpose! IMPORTANT! Download our community Ark logo. Get PDF [HERE](#) or click ARK image above. Print it out and put a waterproofed version onto a prominent signpost in your land or print it onto a flag. Write (or print and paste) ‘This is an Ark’ clearly beside the logo. If you only manage the words, that works fine too.

Add the Website address clearly for passers-by or for interested neighbours to help them understand that there is a good reason for what people often see as a ‘messy garden’.

www.wearetheark.org

Be creative with your sign! I am looking forward to seeing the more creative productions!

Spread the word and share your signs online if you would like to, using the **#thisisanark** and **#letsbuildanark** so we can find them. We will repost as many as we are able on our social media sites.

Now you can be proud and everyone who sees it can research The Ark project on the website.

This land is now connected under the umbrella of our caring community.

Step 2. Think of all those places you could pull in under the umbrella of the Ark!

Examples would be:

1. Sports clubs. Every sports club, (GAA club, soccer club, rugby club, tennis club etc.) you

are more representative of us people than any government could ever be, you have more influence within grass root communities than any local council could have and you can be a huge and powerful inspiration with very little effort and lead by example! Please consider turning as much of your unused land, boundaries etc. into an Ark!

2. Disused railway lines.

3. Land alongside live railway lines.

4. Public parks have so many areas that are not used, these areas could become Arks and reduce the need for maintenance.

5. Those countless mown island beds and shrubberies around every office building, every shopping centre and car park. Bring them back to life and create habitats for life.

6. Industrial estates. These are usually ugly concrete jungles. The impact of their foot prints on the land beneath and around them could be offset a little by restoring an ecosystem to those small places within them that are not covered by concrete.

7. **Grass verges.** Look what can be done with a little imagination and motivation.

8. **EVERY tree is already an Ark!** Every tree that may seem at risk of being felled or just needs to be celebrated, you could hang an Ark sign around it somewhere people can see it. (But no hurtful nails or wires please!)

Step 3. Protect the trees we already have.

Every native tree is an Ark in itself. There is a tendency (particularly in Ireland it seems) which we have all noticed, to brutally, flail – cut miles of hedgerow based trees on roadsides, to cut down healthy stands of trees in villages, towns and cities.

It takes 30 years for a tree to become a full-blown oxygen machine. They **clean our air, calm our nerves**, create shelter, create shade, they **clean our water and hold the fast disappearing soils in place.**

The removal of toxic chemicals such as fluoride compounds, PCB's and trace pharmaceuticals is beyond the capabilities of even our most modern water treatment facilities.

These compounds are now ubiquitous in almost all drinking water and contribute to health problems worldwide. It makes no sense for any person or animal to drink small levels of hundreds of medications daily, or ingest plastic compounds dissolved in water which act as artificial hormones.

The level of (water) cleaning required relies on nature, and natural processes such as transpiration which is accomplished by plants in a healthy ecosystem. Our damaged water can be healed and cleaned in the natural rainwater cycle which includes evaporation, condensation, precipitation and collection.

Our friends the Trees have a unique ability to drink water through their leaves and send it back out as oxygen and water vapour. They suck the water up through their roots from the ground water and in the process filter out harmful chemicals. Further the incredible diverse micro-organisms and bacteria that are synergistic with, and thrive, within the trees' root systems can go to work digesting and breaking these toxins back down to their constituent elements to be recycled again with no harm.

“(Inside Science) — Almost every chemical we create to use in modern pharmaceuticals, personal products or household goods eventually has to go somewhere. We spit toothpaste into the sink. We wash shampoo and soap down the drain. What drugs we don't absorb, digest or metabolize we excrete and flush down the toilet. What cleaning products are not evaporated or

absorbed on our floors or countertops get poured out. Sooner or later all these chemicals end up back in the ground or our drinking water.”

This environmentally sound system for pollution prevention and control is known as *phytoremediation*.

We need to protect every single tree we have already and plant *millions and millions more* in order to survive.

Each one is vital for our future on this planet.

Please stop cutting off their heads and controlling them, whatever your reasons are, they are not life sustaining reasons. Make a stand, step up and protect life. All over the world there are large trees in cities that are allowed to become a natural, mature shape and they are hugely beneficial to **cleaning our air** and **water**, calming anxiety, lifting depression, creating beauty and sustaining life within urban landscapes.

The decision makers at local level, at all levels, need to become the protectors of all life on earth. Start with the trees. Please.

EVERY TREE COUNTS!

Step 4. Ditch the chemicals.

Stop spraying. Leave the land breathe and recover. Chemicals are the main driving force of death in the web of life. The bacteria in the soil are killed off by landscaping chemicals and those bacteria are a vital part of the restoration of health to the land. They are the basis of health in the ecosystem. These commonly used poisons also leach into the waterways and

cause havoc and death in our water ecosystems. *Chemicals have no place in an Ark.* Slug pellets may kill slugs and snails, but they also kill other creatures that unwittingly feed on their dead bodies such as hedgehogs and birds. Rat and mice poison is causing the decimation of our owl populations with only 400 breeding pairs of Barn owls now left in Ireland alone. We need to join the dots. Trying to solve problems with a chemical solution, always leads to other unseen problems.

Everything is connected.

STOP & THINK! Ask ourselves – why are we spraying and trying to kill all the early flowers that are a vital source of food for pollinators? Are they really so bad or disruptive to our lives that they have to be nuked at first sign? Can we change our thought processes and let them do their job before we mow them down and never use counterintuitive chemicals?

Step 5. Reboot!

If the patch of earth is not damaged land, then it is already primed with all the native seeds the site needs to heal itself and reboot an ecosystem that will support all the creatures we share the land with. Just step back and let nature take the lead.

Damaged land.

If it is damaged land which needs help, it may not be obvious at first but you will see the clues for this after some time has passed.

You might not notice the lack of growth for a few seasons or even a year. In urban areas the earth might be poisoned from heavy metals or some other source of pollution. It may be badly compacted or mostly dead from multiple chemical applications. After a year, if it's still looking like not much has happened, then it may be time to make a call to reboot the

ecosystem. Source local open-pollinated, organic, native seeds and sow a wildflower area or a wild herb and clover mix. This will begin the clean-up of the soil and spark new energy.

If it is a thick monoculture sward of lawn, you may need to remove the grass and re-seed it with a native seed mix, as stated above. Plants can find it hard to establish themselves in competition with lawns. However, if it is an old lawn, it may already be full of diversity and you may only need to let it grow long without disturbing it.

You could experiment if you are not sure, and leave the lawn alone to see if it creates a community of wild plants. If after a year, there is still only a crop of grass, then there are various ways to help it along.

DO NOT spray the grass to remove it. There is no place for chemicals here. So much other life, visible and invisible gets hurt from chemicals. Our ecosystems are drowning in chemicals, our water ecosystems are poisoned and everything is weakened from the wider effect of these poisons leaching into the earth. We have to step up and cut this all out! Stop killing everything and become part of the solution to the crisis we are all facing!

Most likely you have machinery at your disposal so the task at hand would be to very lightly scratch up the surface of the area and expose the seed bank in the soil beneath, this would allow the 'weed' seeds in the soil have a chance to germinate. Once the seeds are exposed to light for even the smallest moment, it is enough of a catalyst to spark them into action to grow up and become a plant.

Step 6. Embrace the Wild native plants

Nature scabs over any cuts in her skin with her first aid plaster which is known as the 'weed

seed bank'. Leave them do their important work as they emerge. They provide vital food for insects and pollinators, they shove their feet deep into the soil and draw up minerals from deep down up into their leaves. Once they die back then they re-mineralise the soil as they rot into the earth. Such an important job they have! They are healing the soil. We should encourage and admire them.

Embrace these native plants. They are the front line of nature's army. Instead we have been trained to nuke them at any sign of emergence, see them as messy, unwanted and useless. We need to rebrand these important plants as the native seed bank. The term 'Weeds' is far too derogatory and negative, especially considering the vital part these plants play in rebooting an ecosystem. They are Nature's foundation stones.

For example, many of our native butterflies depend on nettles as a food source for their larvae. The red admiral, the small tortoiseshell, the peacock and the comma. If you have a patch of nettles behind the shed or in a tucked away spot – try to just leave them. You will be doing so much to support these – and many other – insects.

If you want to get more involved, you can gradually plant native plants and trees but remember, nature's intelligent and ancient system is far and away beyond our understanding, so don't try too hard. However, there is always room and a massive welcome for native trees. Source local stock of native trees and shrubs, this provides the most beneficial support for the local insects. Native plants are far more beneficial to insects and birds than non-natives. Over the millennia, layers of relationships have formed between native creatures and native plants. We just don't connect the dots often enough or understand the intricacies of those relationships.

If you need to buy plants, although it may be challenging, try not to buy plants from sources that cannot prove they are not treated with chemicals. These chemicals (fungicides, pesticides and herbicides) are undoing all the good work you are hoping to do, and the pollinators are getting ill collecting pollen from the systemic, persistent chemicals in the life cycle of the plants. Organic, locally sourced and native is best. If you have a gardener, sourcing cuttings from local old growth hedgerows is a very positive move for local wildlife.

Step 7. Embrace the ‘messiness’.

We are losing the magic in the world, in ourselves. We are trained to see wildness in our gardens as ‘messy and lazy’, to see neatness as ‘care’. Neatness in nature means death. There is very little life in a neat garden. There is no magic in a tidy, wall to wall carpet of lawn. There is no hope in those spaces, no sanctuary. Re-wilding land, giving the space back to nature, allows life to thrive once more.

Death is an important part of life.

Standing deadwood supports a huge amount of life. A living mature oak, for example, supports over 500 species of life, but a dead or dying tree supports thousands! Leave the dead leaves, branches and old growth. There is a huge range of support for the living, from the dead and dying elements in nature. Intricate relationships exist between many native plants, fungi, insects and other creatures.

Step 8. Let the scrubby messy thorny thickets be!

Leave those brambles and other thorny natives emerge and thrive. They protect young trees and create wonderful sanctuary for many wild mammals. They are vital for the re-establishment of a native ecosystem. They provide shelter from the wind, protection from

grazers such as deer to allow saplings to establish, they are powerful deep rooters that re-mineralise and restructure the soil and they are also great habitats and food sources for wildlife. The signage will be the key to educating people how beneficial these spaces are to families of all shapes and sizes.

Step 9. Break down those barriers!

Wildlife cannot move easily through fences or walled in spaces. Often it stops them being able to access many sources of food and sanctuary. If you have neighbouring boundary walls or fences, perhaps you could discuss this with the neighbouring land owners and if they agree, then get a contractor to drill a hole or two in the base of each boundary, (checking that you don't de-stabilise them structurally) to allow the free movement of creatures between patches of land.

If your neighbours are on-board, perhaps you could gradually replace solid boundaries with wildlife corridors of native hedgerows which will also provide a strong nesting habitat.

Step 10. Spotlight on life.

Begin to list what creatures have made their homes here. Who have you noticed, what insects, lichens, plants, mushrooms, birds and mammals have claimed sanctuary here?

All of this will be of interest to passers-by and you can share this list on your social media platforms to raise awareness of what you are doing and why it is important. Most often these creatures go un-noticed and un-cared for.

Why not create a noticeboard with animal and plant photos for parents and their children to pause and learn from as they pass by? This is especially impactful in Park Arks and Arks on common land for local councils. This is a great way to market your good intentions. Let's put

a spotlight on the oppressed life we share this world with.

Step 11. Be aware of possible re-wilding concerns.

- Keep an eye out for ‘invasive’ species. We are not at war with these plants. If they are not integrating and allowing the emergence of a native ecosystem, then work gently to restrict or remove them to allow a healthy community to develop. You can research in your part of the world, what those invasive species are. They are different all over the planet now. This is a controversial and difficult problem. Different organisations have different ways of dealing with it. Please research this yourself and make your own call. Chemical controls are not an option for me, anywhere I feel that the effect of their use far outweighs the benefits of removing invasive plants.

I would have thought spraying chemicals was obviously dangerous anywhere there was children at least? It seems basic common sense not to spray playing fields, playgrounds, school grounds etc.

- Wildfires. In hotter parts of the world you may need to consider fire breaks in the emerging plant system in-case of wildfires breaking out. In some parts of the world this is already an issue and may well become a problem in more temperate areas all too soon.

Step 12. Half earth.

I am a big supporter of the ‘Half earth’ theory, which proposes to give half the earth back to nature, to wilderness. If you can’t manage to re-wild half of your land, then any that you can spare, even just the boundaries, is all welcome and important.

Just leave it be.

Let it heal.

Every tiny patch of earth, every Ark matters.

