



Leave No Trace Awareness Introduction



Hello, and thank you for joining millions of others worldwide in learning more about how to protect nature and enjoy the outdoors safely and responsibly through the Leave No Trace principles.

We live in one of the most stunning countries on earth, with rolling hills, ancient forests, wild coastlines, mountain trails and hidden lakes.

Throughout Ireland, we see the development of forest recreation areas, blueways, greenways, public parks, walks and gardens, all for our wellbeing and pleasure.

But that privilege comes with responsibility, and we do have to take care when in nature.

Thankfully, the Leave No Trace awareness principles, a set of seven simple but powerful guidelines, can help us to get more enjoyment from these beautiful places and mind them so they are here for future generations to experience.

These vital principles are:

- Plan ahead and prepare.
- Be considerate of others.
- Respect farm animals and wildlife.
- Travel and camp responsibly.
- Leave what you find.
- Dispose of waste properly.
- And lastly, minimise the effects of fire.

Why, you might ask, does Leave No Trace matter?

Ireland is seeing more and more people heading outdoors, and that's a great thing.

Those of us that spend time in nature know how healing, energising and inspiring it can be.

However, sometimes a lack of awareness can lead to unintended effects that none of us want.

Litter on trails and beaches.
Dogs disturbing wildlife or livestock.
Campsites missed, trampled and damaged.
Fires gone out of control.
Or paths widened by people going off trail.

The Leave No Trace principles help us to enjoy nature without harming it.

These are not rules to restrict us, but guidelines to remind us to be thoughtful and respectful visitors to the land.

Let's take a brief look now at how each of these principles helps.

Watch out for more interactive Leave No Trace signs that explain them in greater detail.

Principle number one.
Plan ahead and prepare.

We want to enjoy our time in nature.

Nobody wants to get soaked or cold, hungry, tired or sunburnt.

Getting lost or injured and needing to call for rescue services is rarely part of the plan, but these happen all the time.

This principle starts before we leave home.

Always, before you head out, check the weather for the day ahead so you know what footwear and layers to bring.

Know your route.

Learn to read a map and follow signs.

Tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back.

Understand local regulations and access rights,
especially around farmland and commonage.

Bring some water and healthy snacks.

Remember, preparation is the first sign of respect
for nature and for your own safety.

Principle number two.

Be considerate of others.

The outdoors is for everyone.

Locals, tourists, bird watchers, trail runners and families alike.

Everybody has different needs,
but generally we all want to experience
the sounds, sights and smells relatively undisturbed.

Otherwise, we'd stay in busy towns and cities.

Being considerate means parking responsibly
and not blocking access,
especially at forestry entry points, rural homes or farmland gates.

Keeping our noise levels low.

Animals have far greater hearing than we do.

If it disturbs us,
we can be sure it disturbs them.

Allowing others on trails to pass by with ease.

Not taking over busy beauty spots.

Remember to smile, say hello and share the space.

Being kind is part of responsible outdoor behaviour.

Principle number three.

Respect farm animals and wildlife.

While Ireland is quite green,
we don't have many areas
that remain truly untouched by humans.

As such, Ireland's wildlife,
from animals and birds to insects,
is often under pressure.

To give them the opportunity to thrive,
which gives us more biodiversity to enjoy:

Observe from a distance.

Don't feed or approach animals.

Keep dogs on a lead,
especially near sheep, birds
or during breeding seasons.

Avoid disturbing nesting areas or sensitive habitats.

Nature watching is a gift,
but only if we leave no harm behind.

Principle number four.
Travel and camp responsibly.

While they might become quiet and still
while we noisily pass on a trail or camp out,
you can be sure that there are creatures very close by.

Try to stick to established trails and campsites where possible.

Going off trail in bogs, sand dunes
or delicate grasslands can cause serious damage,
sometimes for decades.

Ireland has sensitive ecosystems,
and some areas are protected
for their unique geology or species.

If you're wild camping,
use firm durable ground like gravel or dry grass.

Keep your site small
and away from lakes and rivers.

Stay only one night
and leave no trace of your stay.

A good rule:
if it looks untouched, keep it that way.

Principle number five.
Leave what you find.

Ireland is rich in natural and cultural heritage.

Ancient stones, wildflowers, shells, bird nests and fungi.

These belong in the place they were found.

Taking them, even as souvenirs,
removes part of what makes that place special.

Also, carving names in stones is unsightly,
and into trees is harmful.

Their bark, like our skin,
protects them from infection.

Try not to move rocks or structures.

They may have organisms living under them,
or be of historical significance
for those who could learn their stories.

Don't pick wildflowers or fungi.

These could be harmful to you
and food sources for other wildlife.

Remember, enjoy nature through sight, sound and smell.

Take photos
and leave with memories.

Principle number six.
Dispose of waste properly.

This one's simple.

If you bring it in, take it back out.

That includes rubbish.

Some waste takes thousands of years to break down.

Food scraps, yes, even orange peels and tea bags,
they don't belong in that ecosystem.

Toilet paper and dog waste,
both are unpleasant to encounter for us
and can be harmful for native creatures.

There are no magic clean-up fairies in the wild.

Every bit of waste we leave behind
affects wildlife, water quality
and the experience for others.

If you do need to go to the toilet outdoors,
use public toilets when available.

If not, dig a small hole
at least thirty metres from water and trails
and then bury it.

Carry out used tissues or wipes in a sealed bag.

Remember, clean spaces encourage care.

Dirty ones invite more rubbish.

Principle number seven.
Minimise the effects of fire.

A campfire can be very satisfying.

Sitting around its warm glow,
perhaps cooking food or toasting marshmallows.

But in Ireland, fires are a major concern,
especially in upland areas
with dry gorse or heather.

Uncontrolled fires can cause massive environmental damage,
destroy habitats
and put people's lives at risk.

Best practice is to avoid open fires.

Use a camp stove instead.

If a fire is allowed,
use an existing fire ring and keep it small.

Never light fires during dry spells or in the uplands.

Fully extinguish and clean up after.

And remember, in national parks and many other areas,
fires are strictly prohibited for good reason.

So there you have it,
the seven Leave No Trace awareness principles
to keep us all safe and well in nature.

- One. Plan ahead and prepare.
- Two. Be considerate of others.
- Three. Respect farm animals and wildlife.
- Four. Travel and camp responsibly.
- Five. Leave what you find.
- Six. Dispose of waste properly.
- Seven. Minimise the effects of fire.

These aren't about being perfect.
They're about being aware.

Every action we take in nature
does in fact leave some trace.

Our hope is to make it a positive one.

So each time you head into any nature area,
be it the hills or woods,
the coasts, bogs or lakes,
parks or walkways:

Go with intention.
Go with care.
And most of all, go with respect.

Thank you once more
for being part of a movement
that protects what we love,
one footprint, one trail
and one moment at a time.