

Tree By Tree...

by Orla Farrell

**A million schoolchildren on the island of Ireland.
A million trees to be planted by 2023 to reach
the "Plant-for-the-Planet" challenge.**

What is the Plant-for-the-Planet Challenge?

Plant-for-the-Planet was the idea of a nine-year-old boy called Felix. He had homework to do for school, so he researched the polar bear and he discovered that it was not just the polar bear that was in trouble, that people were also in trouble because climate change was clearly a major problem. So he came into school having done his project and suggested to his classmates that, if children in every country of the world could plant one million trees, this would be a very simple way to buy some time while the problem of climate change was addressed. He put out that challenge and within three years one million trees were planted in Germany. Now, ten years later, three million trees have also been planted in the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, and he has inspired children in 67 countries to continue working on this project.

The UN have backed the children's project in that they have given the children charge of the world tree count, when for the first time an inventory of the existing trees on the planet has been done. It's been discovered that we have three trillion trees currently on the planet and that we have room for one more. So, what we are doing

now is, as fast as we can, planting one trillion trees to make it into four trillion.

We are planting trees here in Ireland, but we are also a part of the global network. You see, what's planted in the tropics is very valuable because it grows speedily and has a swift effect on carbon sequestration (capturing CO₂ from the atmosphere), but here in Ireland it has a somewhat slower effect, because the trees do not grow quite as quickly as in the tropics. The tropics have two growing seasons a year, or even more, and some of the trees have a very fast growth rate. Plant-for-the-Planet now has a shop where you can, for 1 Euro, buy a tree to offset, for example, your carbon if you were flying somewhere, or the carbon you emit as a household.

They invited us now to the Trillion Tree website, and for ten Euro, you can sponsor a tree in Ireland. In Ireland we will have planted 10,000 trees as part of this project, by Easter 2019 we have been two years working on the project, with three thousand trees planted last year and three hundred the year before, we are progressing well.



What kind of trees are you planting?

I'm a member of the board of Crann "Trees for Ireland" and our motto is: "The right tree in the right place". Native trees have their place, because they are very suitable for the biodiversity of the location. However, because of the climate change we have to take into account what the weather is going to be like in 30 or 300 years from now and so on, and that's something we don't know. So, by planting trees that are not native, but have become naturalised in Ireland, such as horse chestnut and beech, which have grown in Ireland for hundreds of years, we are making provisions for the future. Also, disease is a factor, and because, for example, the redwoods are in trouble in California now, it's so hot, that they are becoming dehydrated and beetles are nesting in their bark, we are planting 1000 redwood trees at the Giant's Grove in Birr Castle. That is an ark, if you like, to preserve redwoods because they are in trouble in their native land.

How do native trees help biodiversity?

I suppose it's not just people who have a homelessness problem in Dublin, creatures have a homelessness problem, too. If we look at president's Micheal D. Higgins speech yesterday in Dublin Castle, he pointed out that in the last 50 years, 60% of our wild animals have disappeared, there is a crisis of extinction, and the loss of habitat is one of the biggest reasons for this, driven by the human takeover of many habitats for agriculture, housing, roads and so on. So, by restoring habitats we restore places for species to recolonise, that restores biodiversity.

Those would be every sort of species. Bees have currently experienced a very sharp decline in numbers in Ireland in the last five years. Anecdotally, I remember driving to Cork when I was about ten and we would have to stop maybe three or four times on that journey to clean the insects off the windscreen of the car, because there would be so many insects that you couldn't see through the windscreen. I drove down to Cork this week and didn't have to stop once to clean the insects off the car, nor will I because the insects aren't there, even on the narrow roads the insects are gone.

What are your planting days like?

Do you enjoy them?

I enjoy them immensely, and you know something – I don't think enjoyment is as important as the satisfaction that you get for doing what is right. And children know that the right thing to do is to look after their home, our common home. The children instinctively know that by restoring a habitat in nature they are doing something that is a symbol of hope for the future and something that is practical. In the case of an oak tree, it's a habitat for, I think, 360 different species, so that is very satisfying.

It's a bit like house work: you may not feel like hoovering, it may be hard work, you may not feel like washing up after dinner, but you feel so much better once it's done. So, by going out and planting a tree communities feel like they are doing something meanwhile.

I'll describe Malahide, for example, where we have just finished planting 3000 trees, we started at the very beginning of the planting season. We spread Christmas tree bark around the planted trees to keep them from drying, and there is something satisfying about recycling Christmas trees, using them as mulch and the children understood it. We were widening a hedge row, and I think it was obvious that any creature in the hedgerow now would have double space, it's like moving into a house twice as large and they can now have a bigger family! These trees have been selected by the council for their suitability for the site, so we were confident that they are expected to thrive, and that is satisfying.

We moved then to Malahide Castle Demesne, where we planted in the undergrowth of the canopy. The undergrowth that had been there before was an invasive species that had been removed by the council and now we were planting under an aging canopy, we were rejuvenating it with young beech trees, horse chestnuts, oaks, holly trees – a mixture of natives and some naturalised trees. Once again, there was a great spirit of doing something wonderful for the locality. We had a woman of 90, who came and dug a hole, we had a five-week-old baby who was their along with her two bigger sisters – people of every age who we very happy to be out of doors.

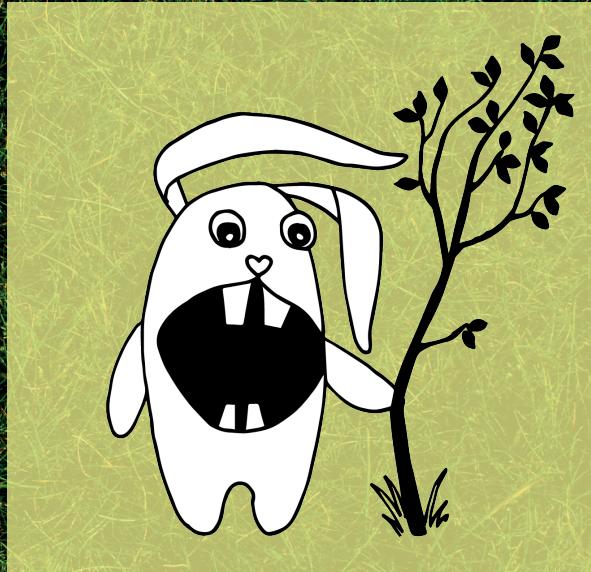
The third site was at the Newbridge House, near the playground there, so the children will be able to see the trees grow as they grow and I think it will be a lovely place for them to visit in years to come.

Wherever I go I meet enthusiasm for this project, people want their children to plant a tree, they want to help to plant a tree, they want to do it as soon as they can. I think that sums up the atmosphere. You get a great credit for an effort that can last for something like five minutes and you get an oak tree or a yew that can live for as long as a thousand years, it certainly beats doing the hoovering!



We are always on the lookout for new sites for planting trees. As you walk around, if you spot a plot of public land (like a park), which would benefit from some trees, give us a shout at orla@easytreesie.com and we'll contact the local council to see if that place would be available. Thank you!

Think bunnies are cute?



For a young tree a rabbit is an awful monster – they gnaw at the bark, and the bark is where water and nutrients are carried from the ground to the branches and the leaves. Without the bark trees wither and die.

Help us find a solution for protecting our newly-planted trees from rabbits – draw your ideas here and send a photo to orla@easytreesie.com to get a chance to be featured in the “Stop talking, start planting” poster campaign.

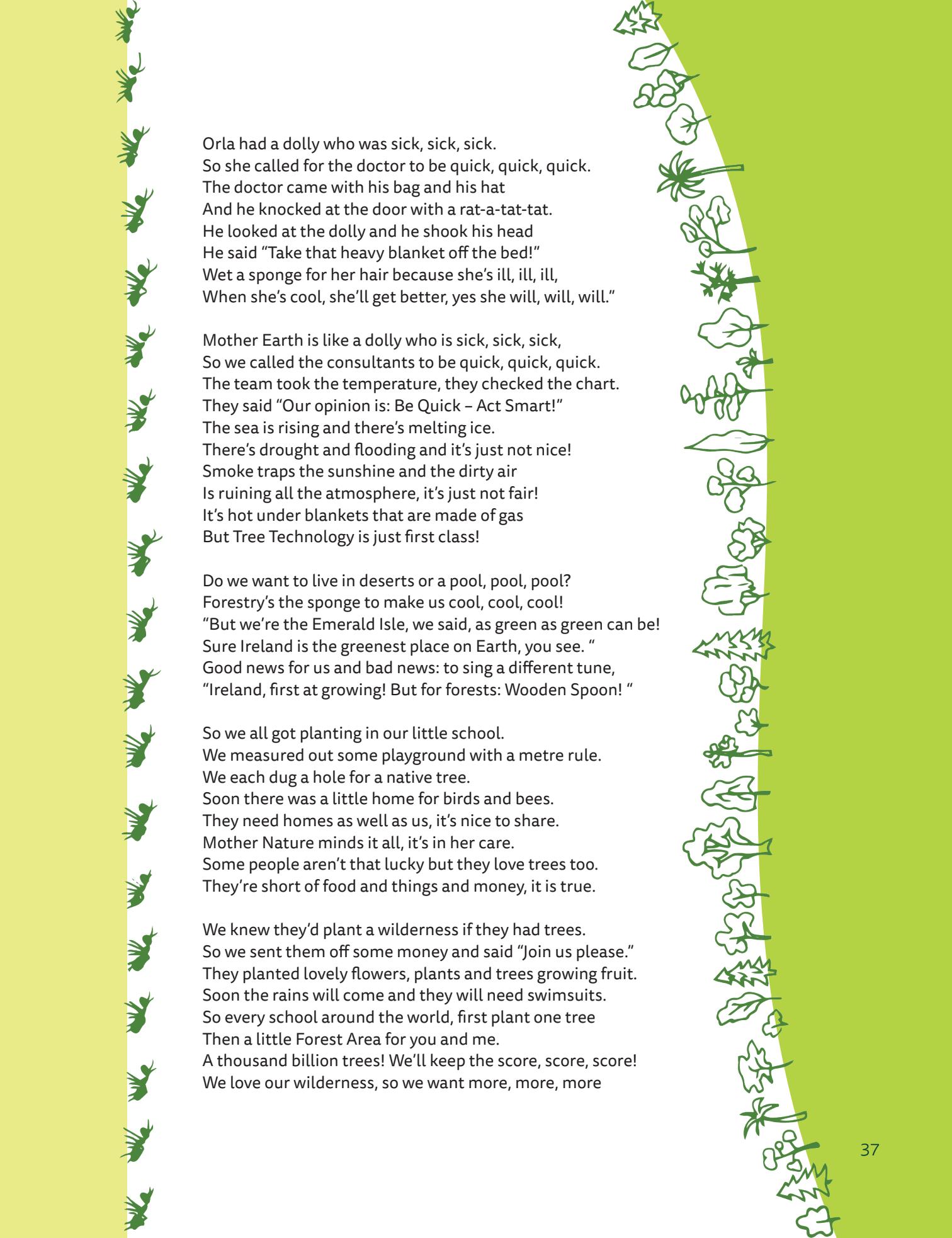
The easytreesie.ie website:





MOTHER EARTH IS LIKE A DOLLY

by Orla Farrell
and the Green School Committee
of St. Laurence National School, Dublin



Orla had a dolly who was sick, sick, sick.
So she called for the doctor to be quick, quick, quick.
The doctor came with his bag and his hat
And he knocked at the door with a rat-a-tat-tat.
He looked at the dolly and he shook his head
He said "Take that heavy blanket off the bed!"
Wet a sponge for her hair because she's ill, ill, ill,
When she's cool, she'll get better, yes she will, will, will."

Mother Earth is like a dolly who is sick, sick, sick,
So we called the consultants to be quick, quick, quick.
The team took the temperature, they checked the chart.
They said "Our opinion is: Be Quick – Act Smart!"
The sea is rising and there's melting ice.
There's drought and flooding and it's just not nice!
Smoke traps the sunshine and the dirty air
Is ruining all the atmosphere, it's just not fair!
It's hot under blankets that are made of gas
But Tree Technology is just first class!

Do we want to live in deserts or a pool, pool, pool?
Forestry's the sponge to make us cool, cool, cool!
"But we're the Emerald Isle, we said, as green as green can be!
Sure Ireland is the greenest place on Earth, you see."
Good news for us and bad news: to sing a different tune,
"Ireland, first at growing! But for forests: Wooden Spoon!"

So we all got planting in our little school.
We measured out some playground with a metre rule.
We each dug a hole for a native tree.
Soon there was a little home for birds and bees.
They need homes as well as us, it's nice to share.
Mother Nature minds it all, it's in her care.
Some people aren't that lucky but they love trees too.
They're short of food and things and money, it is true.

We knew they'd plant a wilderness if they had trees.
So we sent them off some money and said "Join us please."
They planted lovely flowers, plants and trees growing fruit.
Soon the rains will come and they will need swimsuits.
So every school around the world, first plant one tree
Then a little Forest Area for you and me.
A thousand billion trees! We'll keep the score, score, score!
We love our wilderness, so we want more, more, more