Foraging and Edible Plants

Activity Risk Assessment • 60-minute observation-based session

Activity	Plant identification, observation and responsible-foraging learning	**Duration**	60 minutes
Location	To be completed after site check	**Assessment date**	_____
Assessor / leader	_____	**Review date**	_____
Group / numbers	_____	**Approval**	_____

Activity description

Scouts learn to observe and identify common wild plants using photographs, field guides and leader-selected examples. They discuss poisonous lookalikes, seasonal availability, UK foraging responsibilities and sustainable practice. This assessment is for an **observation-only session**: no tasting, chewing, collecting, food preparation or consumption of wild plants is permitted.

Non-negotiable activity limits

No tasting or eating. No plant, berry, flower, leaf, seed or root is to be put in the mouth. Do not collect plants or take samples away. Do not handle unknown plants. Use photographs or leader-checked specimens viewed in place. Any later practical food activity requires a separate plan and risk assessment.

Risk rating guide

Use the organisation's risk-rating matrix if one is prescribed. The ratings below are indicative only and must be reviewed against the actual site, group, weather, supervision and current procedures. Residual risk assumes all listed controls are implemented.

Risk controls and emergency arrangements

Hazard	Potential harm	Initial	Control measures	Residual
Misidentification / poisonous plants	Accidental contact with toxic plants or mistaken belief that a plant is edible.	High	Observation only; use reliable field guides and verified photos/specimens; leader selects examples in advance; teach multiple-feature identification and lookalikes; no tasting, picking or handling unknown plants; stop activity if uncertain.	Low
Accidental ingestion	A participant tastes a plant, berry or hand contamination reaches the mouth.	High	State and repeat no-tasting rule; keep food and snacks separate from the activity; supervise closely; handwashing before eating; do not distribute samples. If ingestion is suspected, seek urgent medical advice/Poisoning advice and follow emergency procedures; call 999 for severe symptoms.	Low
Stings, bites and skin irritation	Nettles, thorns, irritant sap, insects or ticks cause discomfort or injury.	Medium	Choose low-risk observation route; do not touch plants; long sleeves and suitable footwear; warn about nettles, brambles and irritant sap; check for ticks after activity and follow local guidance; first-aid kit available.	Low
Slips, trips and falls	Uneven ground, roots, mud, slopes, holes or low branches.	Medium	Pre-check route; use clear paths where possible; set boundaries and regroup points; suitable footwear; no running; adapt route to mobility and weather; maintain appropriate supervision.	Low
Contamination	Plants or hands contaminated by dog fouling, animal waste, chemicals, roadside pollution or stagnant water.	High	Do not gather or eat anything; avoid roadsides, sprayed areas, polluted sites and dog-walking hotspots; do not handle animal waste or stagnant water; provide handwashing; use photographs if site cleanliness is uncertain.	Low
Allergy or asthma response	Pollen, plant contact, insect stings or environmental triggers.	Medium	Check relevant participant needs and emergency plans in advance; avoid known triggers; do not handle flowers or plants; carry prescribed medication as agreed with parent/carer and organisational policy; leaders know emergency response.	Low
Weather and environmental exposure	Cold, heat, sun, rain, wind or dehydration.	Medium	Check forecast; cancel or modify for unsafe conditions; suitable clothing, sun protection and drinking water; use shade/shelter; monitor participants and shorten session if needed.	Low
Separation / boundary breach	Participant wanders off, enters unsafe terrain or leaves supervised group.	High	Set clear boundaries and headcount points; use buddy groups; explain stop signal; adults positioned to maintain sight and hearing; follow the organisation's supervision ratios and missing-person procedure.	Low
Tools and equipment	Scissors, knives, magnifiers or other equipment cause cuts or misuse.	Medium	No cutting tools required for this lesson; do not bring knives or harvesting tools. Hand lenses and clipboards used under instruction; check equipment before and after use.	Low
Safeguarding / unsuitable site access	Group encounters members of public, traffic, water hazards or inaccessible terrain.	Medium	Complete a site visit; choose a suitable permitted area; follow safeguarding and supervision procedures; avoid water edges and traffic; agree access and emergency arrangements; provide accessible alternatives.	Low

General control arrangements

• **Leader briefing:** Explain the activity limits, boundaries, stop signal, buddy system and emergency procedure before moving off.

• **Supervision:** Use the current organisation-approved adult-to-young-person ratios and safeguarding arrangements. Do not rely on this document to set ratios.

• **Site management:** Record the exact site, access points, hazards, nearest suitable vehicle access and emergency meeting point before approval.

• **Personal protective equipment:** Weather-appropriate clothing, sturdy closed-toe footwear and any individually required protective or medical equipment.

• **Hygiene:** Handwashing with soap and clean water before eating or touching the face. No wild foods are served during this activity.

• **Waste:** Leave no litter; take all equipment and waste away. Do not damage plants or disturb wildlife.

Emergency response

• **Injury or illness:** Stop the activity, make the area safe, provide first aid within training, and contact emergency services when required.

• **Suspected plant ingestion:** Stop the activity and seek urgent medical advice immediately. Do not induce vomiting. Keep a photo or safe identification information for medical professionals if available; do not delay seeking help. Call 999 for severe symptoms, collapse, breathing difficulty or seizures.

• **Missing participant:** Stop the group, maintain supervision of everyone present and activate the organisation's missing-person procedure.

• **Severe weather or unsafe site conditions:** Stop, move to the agreed safe location and follow the activity cancellation or evacuation plan.

Pre-activity site-specific checks

■ Permission to use the site confirmed; local restrictions and protected-site rules checked.

■ Route and activity area inspected on the day; hazards and boundaries briefed.

■ Weather and ground conditions suitable; alternative plan agreed.

■ Participant needs, allergies, asthma and relevant medical/emergency plans considered.

■ First-aid kit, communication method, emergency access and meeting point confirmed.

■ Appropriate supervision and safeguarding arrangements confirmed.

■ Plant examples are leader-verified; no tasting, picking, handling unknown plants or food preparation.

Approval and review

Assessor name	_____
Signature	_____
Date	_____
Leader approval	_____
Review after changes / incident	_____

Important

This is a generic planning template, not a substitute for a site-specific assessment or the organisation's current rules and procedures. The activity leader must review and amend it before use, including the current UK nation, site access rules, participant needs, supervision, weather and emergency arrangements.