



REPORT

Green Foundation Ireland

invites you to an evening online TALK
with **Catherine Cleary,**
Co-Founder of **Pocket Forests**

***What is a Pocket Forest,
and Why Do We Need Them?***



Venue: by Zoom (details given after registration)

Wednesday 20 September 2023 – 19:00 to 20:00

Admission to this event is **FREE** but you **MUST** register beforehand.
You can do so through **our Eventbrite page.**

What is a Pocket Forest and Why Do We Need Them?

THEME

Pocket Forests is an award-winning social enterprise working to reconnect people living in urban areas with nature. A large part of its focus is on marginalised communities. They plant native Irish trees and shrubs in small spaces making pockets of high density forests in urban environments together with the local community.

This talk explored the work done and the principles by which Pocket Forests operates, as well as giving advice to people who wished to create healthy green spaces in their homes or communities.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Catherine Cleary



Catherine is co-founder of Pocket Forests and has almost three decades' experience as a journalist and author. She is ambitious about developing strategic partnerships in environmental action with real impacts which create a just transition to a more sustainable world.

She has created several podcasts and written four books. Catherine writes a weekly column for *The Irish Times*, which you can find [here](#).

ABOUT OUR FACILITATOR

Ciaran Monahan

Ciaran, who is part of our Management Team at Green Foundation Ireland, is a postdoctoral researcher in University College Dublin. His research interests include education, environmental risk assessment, and food safety.

He has completed a number of works for GFI, including an analysis of sustainability topics in the Leaving Certificate, as well as event hosting.

ABOUT OUR TALK

Ciaran Monahan welcomed everyone to our talk and introduced **Catherine Cleary**. Catherine told us how her journey began, in that her locality had the lowest area of green space per person in the city. During the COVID lockdown, she noticed the dearth of nature and wildlife in her area. Her locality, due to recent population growth and urbanisation, has less than 1 square metre per person, the WHO recommendation being that there be 9 square metres of green space per person. Ireland's forestry situation is low and lack of nature is significant; even considering all the forests in the country, very few of those are native, and most are commercial. Because of this, Pocket Forests was established.



Urban greenery has a positive impact on mental health: touching trees can cause an observed drop in cortisol levels, suggesting relaxation. Catherine emphasised the value of these benefits in a time when mental health challenges are soaring. She recommended the book [*Reconnection: Fixing our Broken Relationship with Nature*](#) (Pelagic Publishing, 2023) by Miles Richardson, who is Professor of Human Factors and Nature Connectedness at the University of Derby in the UK, where he founded the [Nature Connectedness Research Group](#).

Catherine continued by giving tips about the most successful methods for tree planting. The best approach is to plant young trees, and in groups of three or more, creating better root systems, which lessens risk of storm damage, and can absorb more water, than the typical model. She mentioned that the emissions for transporting and planting trees in cities mean that it takes several years for them to offset their carbon footprint, so it is essential that trees, once planted, survive and thrive.

Catherine went on to discuss the difference between pocket forests and typical tree planting in Ireland. These differences include the use of repurposed materials to simulate natural conditions, and the planting of native trees close together. One important reason planting native trees is important is that they flower, drop fruits, and drop leaves, at the right time for native soil and wildlife.

Pocket Forests continues to engage with communities and families to help develop their understanding of ecosystems that will last and benefit communities. Catherine finished the talk by showing us examples of positive project outcomes, based in schools, private homes, and parks, and the good work that Pocket Forests has done throughout the country.

You can [access our video of the talk here](#).