



# Volunteer's Guide to the Girl Scout Tree Promise\*

Find tips and ideas to guide Girl Scouts and other participants through this program.

Girl Scouts have pledged to take 5 million actions to address climate change, including planting, protecting, and honoring trees through the Girl Scout Tree Promise (GSTP). The GSTP provides every Girl Scout and friend of the Movement with an opportunity to act as environmental stewards and slow climate change. Since the GSTP first began in 2021 (in partnership with the [Elliott Wildlife Values Project](#), [American Forests](#), and the [Arbor Day Foundation](#)), Girl Scouts have planted tens of thousands of trees as well as protecting and honoring many more.

Each of us brings different knowledge, skills, and passions to Girl Scouts—and because of that, we have a variety of ways to participate in the GSTP. Our program includes ideas for young people of all ages, but you'll know best which activities will work best for your participants' age level and interests. They may want to work on the activities at events, during troop meetings, on their own, or with their families, caregivers, and friends. They might take part in a backyard, at camp, or in their community. You might even host (or help youth host) an event to plant trees, do other GSTP activities, or learn from guest speakers.

There are two steps to the GSTP: taking the Promise and doing an activity to plant, protect, or honor trees. Once youth have completed both steps, the patch can be purchased from the [Girl Scout Shop](#).

Find out more about the Girl Scout Tree Promise at [girlscouts.org/treepromise](https://girlscouts.org/treepromise).

If you're accessing this program online, this booklet contains live links to relevant resources. If you're using the printed booklet, many of the resources can be accessed through the primary program page at: [girlscouts.org/treepromise](https://girlscouts.org/treepromise).

**Why Girl Scouts?** The Girl Scout Promise and Law encourage us to “use resources wisely” and “make the world a better place.” Beginning in 1912 with our founder, Juliette Gordon Low, Girl Scouts have made a special place in their hearts for environmental stewardship, speaking out, and taking action—in ways both big and small. The GSTP empowers youth to address climate change in a very concrete way. In addition to the local and global implications of planting and protecting trees, youth can experience the tangible benefits of trees as they develop their leadership and organizational skills.

## Step 1: Make the Girl Scout Tree Promise

Thinking about climate change can be stressful and overwhelming—many youth today feel this, and they're both angry and worried about the future of our planet. By exploring the subject, they'll be better equipped to act as environmental stewards who can make a difference. That's why the first step in the GSTP is for young people to learn about trees.

To get started, use the Activity Guide to help participants to make the Girl Scout Tree Promise and commit to building a better future with trees. Brainstorm places they might have experienced or can experience trees, such as parks, yards, forests, or along sidewalks (this will also help you choose an activity for Step 2). Then support participants in doing an activity from the booklet (or another activity of their choosing) to learn about climate change and trees.

Here are some ideas to support young people in learning more about the topic:

- **Share the science.** Let youth share what they might already know. Provide simple and concrete explanations. Share basics such as the definition of weather versus

\*Access additional activities, tools, and materials at [my.girlscouts.org](https://my.girlscouts.org).

**Important note:** Links to third-party websites are provided for convenience only. Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) does not endorse or support the content of third-party links and is not responsible for the content or accuracy, availability, or privacy/security practices of other websites, and/or services or goods that may be linked to or advertised on such third-party websites. By clicking on a third-party link, you will leave the current GSUSA site whereby policies of such third-party link may differ from those of GSUSA.

climate and information about how a rising temperature leads to extreme weather. Discuss the role of trees and how human behavior contributes to climate change.

- **Start small but think big.** Share information about climate change and tree protection in your community to brainstorm changes youth can make as individuals. Then “zoom out” to what their families, communities, states, the nation, and the world can do. Remind youth that they can be leaders, advocates, and activists no matter their age.
- **Turn fear into motivation.** Ask youth how they feel about climate change and acknowledge any fear, anger, or anxiety. Share examples of how humanity has made major advances in the face of challenges, such as responding to natural disasters with humanitarian aid or preventing the spread of serious diseases and illnesses like measles, polio, and COVID-19.
- **Balance your examples.** When discussing the harmful impacts of climate change, also highlight positive examples where people are making a difference. For example, people plant trees and preserve existing forests; citizen scientists gather data; and engineers develop alternative energy sources. Find local and relatable stories of young people addressing climate change or creating change with trees.

## Step 2: Plant, Protect, or Honor Trees

Once youth understand the importance of trees, they’re ready to plant, protect, and honor them! Use the Activity Guide to help youth choose an activity from the Plant, Protect, or Honor list. Participants only need to do ONE activity from any ONE list (not all) to complete the Girl Scout Tree Promise.

### ► Activity: Plant Trees

Youth can help their community by planting trees. They might plant trees at an event, plant them in an area where they’ll be [most helpful](#), sponsor trees to [honor loved ones](#), or even host their own tree planting. Since hosting a tree-planting event can require a considerable amount of time and resources, consider connecting with your council, local tree-planting organizations, and/or community partners. You may find existing opportunities to help lessen the workload and support work that’s already happening.

#### How to Plant a Tree:

1. **Set a date.** When will you plant? Though varying by region, trees usually do best when planted during times of moderate temperature and rainfall. Choose a time in spring or early fall so each new tree has time to settle in before the first frost or summer heat.
2. **Select a site.** Where will you plant? In a yard, at a park, on a campground, on community property, outside a house of worship, or somewhere else? Plant at least

15 feet away from buildings. Look “up, down, and around” to make sure there’s enough space for the tree’s roots and branches to reach full size and that it doesn’t extend onto nearby property, sidewalks, or driveways or overhead into power lines. Avoid any hazards, such as poison ivy and broken glass. Get permission to plant from the local government for public land or from the private landowner. Call 811 or [submit an online request](#) to locate and avoid underground and overhead utilities.

**Did You Know?** Three well-placed deciduous (leaf-losing) trees—one each on the east, south, and west sides of a building—provide enough summer shade to lower the building’s cooling costs by 10 to 50 percent.

3. **Choose a tree.** What will you plant? Have youth research which trees are native to your area and “right” for the site. Ask local experts, such as local nursery staff or your [state urban forestry office](#), for recommendations.

When choosing a tree, make sure to consider these factors:

- **Native vs. non-native:** Tree species may be native or non-native to an area. Native species come from and have adapted to the local habitat and are usually a safe choice for planting. Some non-native species are invasive, which means they tend to spread and prevent other plants from growing. Avoid these species. Not all non-native species take over the local ecosystem, but they may not adapt well to it and often require more care than native species.
- **Age and size:** Depending on your site, you might choose a seedling, sapling, or one- to three-year-old tree.
- **Planting site:** Make sure the climate, planting zone, soil quality, water, space, and sun exposure of your planting site match the needs of your tree.
- **Purpose:** You might choose a tree based on its eventual mature appearance, capacity to bear fruit, potential to provide shade, ability to conserve energy, and any other benefits. Consider allergy-friendly trees.

Once you have picked your tree type, make your purchase online, at a local nursery, or through the [Arbor Day Foundation](#). It may help to compare the sellers’ prices, quality, and stock. You may also be able to join a local planting group, find trees through your local government, or find tree giveaways for your community.

4. **Assemble equipment and supplies.** What will you need for the planting? Follow the instructions starting on page 9 of the Activity Guide to gather equipment and any materials. Decide how you'll get water to the newly planted trees. With a bit of coordination, youth may be able to help gather materials.
5. **Prepare the site to be safe and accessible.** Clean any competing vegetation (such as weeds). Mulch the area, if you'd like, to make it easier for people to access and enjoy the tree. If you're planting multiple trees, you might also mark where each tree will go with a flag.
6. **Plant the tree(s).** Follow the instructions starting on page 9 of the Activity Guide to help youth plant balled and burlapped trees, containerized and rootbag trees, or bare root and containerized seedlings.
7. **Log the tree(s).** Add the tree(s) to the [Girl Scout Tree Promise Tracker](#). If youth are under 13 years old, an adult must add the tree data on their behalf.
8. **Create a care plan.** Use the chart on page 14 of the Activity Guide for youth to create a plan (or share it with the person who'll be responsible) to take care of the tree(s).
9. **Protect the tree(s).** Help youth follow their plan to care for the tree(s) by writing and tracking the dates they complete the tasks.

#### ► **Activity: Protect Trees**

By protecting trees, youth can learn more about how trees are part of our ecosystem and what they can do to support tree protection efforts locally and globally. They might explore invasive species, collect data about trees, engage local officials, connect with others, or do anything else to protect trees.

Here are some ideas to support youth as they do any activity to protect trees:

- **Identify what threats trees face in their communities.** Trees can be susceptible to unanticipated natural threats such as pests, common tree diseases, and extreme weather that weaken or damage their leaves and roots. Human activities like logging, deforestation, and the destruction of urban parks also threaten trees. Help youth research what threats are most prevalent to trees in their local communities. Then they can search for groups that are working to find ways to protect trees and minimize these threats.
- **Explore tree equity.** Unfortunately, many places suffer from a lack of trees and so do the people who live there. People with low incomes tend to live in neighborhoods with fewer trees, and it's often these same communities that feel the biggest impact from climate change. For example, in cities, trees help cool communities, reducing the heat island effect created by buildings, machines,

and pavement that generate and trap heat. Use the [Tree Equity Score](#) to help youth explore tree equity and the actions they can take to protect trees and help everyone to enjoy their benefits.

- **Find experts to help.** While expertise and experience aren't necessary to protect trees, involving others who can talk to youth about their work and knowledge of topics such as tree protection, climate action, and conservation can bring the material to life. It can also provide youth with a mentor or role model for making a difference.
- **Support those already working in the space.** Help youth to explore tree protection locally and globally and learn about the similar challenges trees face around the world. Youth might research areas where trees are threatened, including their local communities, and connect with organizations working to protect them. For example, they might seek out a group working on tree protection in their community to volunteer with a local project, or they might educate and raise awareness in their community about the global threat to trees and what people can do locally to help.

#### ► **Activity: Honor Trees**

Honoring trees gives youth the chance to share their new knowledge, building community support for trees and awareness about ways to slow climate change. It also deepens their personal connection to trees and conservation. For example, they might identify trees, share a special tree's story, try tree math, explore the special roles of trees across cultures, or do anything else to honor trees.

Here are some ideas to support youth in choosing an activity to honor trees:

- **Build community through trees.** Help youth connect with neighbors, friends, and local community organizations to promote community engagement around the beauty, vitality, and importance of trees. These activities could include adopt-a-tree programs, tree care workshops, tree art installations, or visits to local botanical gardens and arboretums to learn about different tree species.
- **Share a message of hope.** Getting the word out and amplifying what people are already doing to create change can inspire others to get involved in climate action and tree protection. Help youth share information about the power of trees, what trees mean to them, and how others can help in person or online. For example, they might talk with their neighbors or connect with friends through social media. They might create posters, social media content, or anything else that inspires them. They might host tree-focused events such as workshops, discussion panels, or even tree photo contests.

- **Honor moments and loved ones with trees.** Dedicating a tree to honor people or an accomplishment can be a memorable, living tribute. Youth might plant trees in honor of others through [American Forests](#) or the [Arbor Day Foundation](#). They might create a memorial, such as a plaque, bench, or rock garden, near a cherished tree.
- **Embrace special days with trees.** Celebrating trees on special days throughout the year can promote appreciation, significance, and awareness of the importance of trees. It may also help you find activities or events in your local community that youth can attend to learn more about trees and climate change. Connecting trees with non-tree-related days, such as International Day of the Girl, can also highlight intersections between climate and other issues, such as gender equality.

**March 8:** International Women’s Day

**Week of March 12:** Girl Scout Week and Girl Scouts Celebrate Faith

**March 21:** International Day of Forests

**April:** Citizen Science Month and Girl Scout Volunteer Appreciation Month

**April 22:** Earth Day

**Last Friday in April:** Arbor Day (may vary based on when is best for planting in your area)

**Second weekend in September:** [Girl Scouts Love State Parks](#)

**October 11:** International Day of the Girl

**Anytime:** Service days, faith holidays, and government holidays

## Unlock the Patch

Once youth make the Girl Scout Tree Promise and complete one activity from “Plant, protect, or honor trees,” the patch can be purchased from the [Girl Scout Shop](#).

## Keep the Fun Going!

The Girl Scout Tree Promise is just one way Girl Scouts and other youth can address climate change. If the GSTP has sparked interest in your youth, they may want to continue learning and taking action around trees, climate, and the environment.

Here are some ideas for next steps Girl Scouts can take to amplify their experience and make a difference for trees, people, and our planet:

- **Badges:** Girl Scouts can complete a badge or another Girl Scout program that focuses on STEM, outdoors, and

advocacy. Brownies might earn Eco Friend while Cadettes take on the Trees badge. Girl Scouts of all ages can earn the STEM Career Exploration badge, focusing on careers related to nature and the environment. They may also find ways to connect other experiences, such as the Girl Scout Cookie Program®. For example, they could use troop cookie proceeds to purchase tree-planting supplies or incorporate the GSTP into the [Cookie Business badges](#). Find out more about Girl Scout badges and awards with the [Award and Badge Explorer](#).

- **Community service or Take Action project:** One of the easiest ways Girl Scouts can amplify what they’ve already done is through a community service or Take Action project. They might volunteer with a local organization or plan a Take Action project to create sustainable change around the environment and climate change in their community.
- **Highest Awards:** Girl Scouts in grades 4–12 can connect trees and climate change with community problem solving as part of their Highest Award projects. Girl Scouts can use their new knowledge to make a difference as they earn their Bronze, Silver, or Gold Award.
- **Community Service bar and Torch awards:** Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors can earn the Community Service bar and the Silver and Gold Torch awards by supporting an environmental organization.
- **Service-Learning Travel Opportunities:** Girl Scouts might want to travel across the country or the globe through a Girl Scout–sponsored travel program ([Destinations](#) or council trips), a [troop trip](#), or any trip with service learning, such as tree planting, climate change, or environmental stewardship.

Not a Girl Scout volunteer? Join us! Learn more [here](#).

## Resources

Tree and environmental organizations, businesses, and other groups may be able to provide you with information, advice, supplies, resources, and connections to other groups interested in tree planting, tree protection, and climate change.

### Learn More with Girl Scouts

- **Girl Scout Tree Promise website:** Find the most recent information and resources for the program, as well as links to access the Tree Tracker, the Girl Scout Shop to purchase the patch, the Girl Scout Tree Promise on SciStarter, and more.
- **GSTP on the Girl Scout Shop:** Purchase the patch to celebrate young people’s accomplishments in planting, protecting, or honoring trees.



- **[Girl Scout Tree Promise on SciStarter](#):** Girl Scouts has teamed up with SciStarter to curate projects to protect and honor trees through citizen science. Find a project for youth to collect data for professional scientists and complete the GSTP at the same time.
- **Related programs:** Check out the [Award and Badge Explorer](#) and the [Girl Scout Activity Zone](#) to find Girl Scout programs and activities related to STEM and the outdoors.

### Local Resources

- **[Local tree organizations](#):** These organizations specialize in tree planting. They offer information about tree-planting events and resources along with technical assistance and sometimes free trees.
- **Local nurseries:** Nurseries are excellent sources for advice on which trees to plant in your community. They can also grow and provide trees for any planting project—especially useful if you’re planning to plant in your own yard or on other privately owned properties.
- **Local government:** Contact your city council, mayor’s office, or department of urban forestry to find out more about tree planting and protection in your area. These contacts may also be a source for free trees.
- **Girl Scout council:** Your local council may have events, resources, partners, and other activities related to the GSTP, STEM, and the outdoors that can help support what you do.

### State Resources

- **[State Forester](#):** The State Forester is the head forestry official in your state. Every state has a network of foresters who help groups like yours when planting and protecting trees. Many state forestry agencies also run tree nurseries where you can buy tree seedlings.
- **[State Urban and Community Tree Coordinator](#):** State Urban and Community Forestry Coordinators are a great resource from your state forestry agency—they’re specialists who can provide support and expertise to help you plant and protect trees in your community.
- **State parks:** State parks are protected areas that are managed at a state level. They’re often established to protect a site because of its natural beauty, historic significance, or recreational possibilities.
- **Conservation districts:** Conservation district employees are focused on local conservation issues and provide expertise on the stewardship and conservation of soil, water, forests, and wildlife. They can help connect you with resources in your local community.

### National Resources

- **[American Forests](#):** American Forests is the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the United States and serves as the GSTP’s [subject matter partner](#). They also offer [career resources](#), a [career exploration guide](#), and a high school [curriculum](#) around green careers and urban forestry.
- **[Arbor Day Foundation](#):** The Arbor Day Foundation is the GSTP’s tree-planting partner. Girl Scouts purchase trees from the Foundation’s [online nursery](#) to plant in their communities or to honor loved ones. The organization also offers [tree planting and care information](#) and other [useful resources](#).
- **[Girl Scouts on SciStarter](#):** Find citizen science projects for Girl Scouts, volunteers, and others to explore outdoor STEM. Youth might collect data on anything from the number of squirrels in their area to descriptions of the clouds above them, while completing Girl Scout programs at the same time.

**Explore Careers Helping Trees:** Guide youth in exploring how their interests today can become a future career helping the environment. Do they like to spend time in nature? They might be interested in becoming an arborist or hydrologist. Interested in building or inventing? Check out environmental engineering. Ask youth about their dreams and interests, especially as they might relate to trees or climate change. Use “Build the Future of Trees” in the Activity Guide to share career ideas, tailoring the discussion to the youths’ unique talents and interests. Then, when there’s a field or job that interests them, help youth research and learn more. You can help connect them with related professionals, organizations, and opportunities. They might even volunteer, take a related class, or join a club at school or in their community.

To explore more about careers related to trees, check out these [resources](#) and this [list of careers](#) from American Forests. Girl Scouts can also earn the **STEM Career Exploration Badge** for their level and find out how a career related to nature and the environment can help them change the world!



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