

An Uimhir Iolra

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Students are often confused by the different ways plurals are formed in Irish. Traditionally, grammars have divided nouns into five 'declensions'. A declension refers to a grouping of nouns which follow a common pattern in forms. These are divided according to the way in which the genitive singular is formed. The formation of the plural, however, reveals variation within each declension and repetition of the same endings across different declensions. As well, the different dialects of Irish may use variant forms for some words. Nevertheless, learning to form the plurals of the most commonly used words is usually not a too difficult a task.

Remember that the singular definite article is **an**. This causes lenition in the initial consonant of a feminine noun. In the case of a masculine noun beginning with a vowel, a **t-** is prefixed to the noun. This prefixed **t-** also occurs in feminine nouns beginning with an **s-**

e.g. **an bád (m)**
 an cháis (f)
 an t-urlár (m)
 an oifig (f)
 an tsráid (f)
 an sagart (m)

The plural article is **na**. This requires that an **h-** be prefixed to all nouns beginning with a vowel, both masculine and feminine.

an oifig - na hoifigí
an t-urlár - na hurláir

The **t** placed before a vowel usually is joined to the word with a

hyphen. The hyphen is usually absent with **ts** or **h+vowel**.

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An Chéad Díochlaonadh-- The First Declension

The largest group in the first declension form plurals by making the final broad consonant(s) slender. To indicate the change in pronunciation, the glide vowel *i* is inserted before the last consonant(s). The *i* itself is not pronounced as a vowel, but the sound of the consonant is altered.

cat - cait

bád- báid

leabhar - leabhair

árasán - árasáin

The vowel combination **ea** becomes **i**, while **éa** becomes **éi**.

fear - fir

buidéal - buidéil

The ending **ch** becomes slender as **igh** .

marcach - marcaigh

Éireannach - Éireannaigh

Most words for nationalities end in **-ach** and consequently quite a large number of nouns form their plurals this way.

The combination **ia** becomes **éi**:

iasc - éisc

Here is a list of nouns which form their plurals by softening the hard consonant:

bord	clog
cnoc	crann
focal	capall
leabhar	ceann
peann	bradán
béal	páipéar
clúdach	coileach
asal	amhrán
éan	uan
urlár	arán
earrach	fómhar
geimhreadh	samhradh
airgead	gabhar
aerfort	amadán
bindelán	bochtán
botún	camán
bréagán	capall
cumann	cupán
easpag	Gael
gasúr	gluaisteán
inneall	oileán
nuachtán	sagart
scamall	suíochán
ticéad	séipéal
foirgneamh	pinsean
gort	port
corp	bacach
ospidéal	cléireach
turas	caisleán
fear	eolas

banc
Éireannach
Sasanach
Francach
Beilgeach
Gearmánach
Portaingéalach
Ioslannach
Sualannach
Meiriceánach
Síneach
Afracach
Ceanadach
leathanach
sionnach
airgead

aistear
Albanach
Spáinneach
Ollanach
Lucsamburgach
Danmhargach
Iodálach
Ioruach
Rúiseach
Astrálach
Indiach
Seapánach
Polannach
óstach
fionnadh
ceann

There are a few other ways to form plurals in this same group. These consist of adding an ending rather than softening the final consonant. There are a number of patterns:

One pattern consists of adding an -a:

ceart - cearta
cág - cága
gob - goba
nod - noda

úll - úlla
cleas - cleasa
cuas - cuasa

When the -a is added to **briathar**, a syllable is lost:
briathar - briathra

Some add -ta:

scéal - scéalta
néal - néalta
gaol - gaolta
síol - síolta
braon - braonta
dún - dúnta
srian - srianta

dán - dánta
seol - seolta
saol - saolta
stól - stólta
cuan - cuanta
líon - líonta
glór - glórtha*

A number have -anna as the plural form:

carr - carranna
bás - básanna
gléas - gléasanna
marc - marcanna
saghas - saghasanna

rós - rosanna
carr - carranna
luas - luasanna
nós - nósanna
spás - spásanna

Another pattern has the plural formed with -e:

doras - doirse
bóthar - bóithre
solas - soilse
uasail - uaisle

A few words which end in -ach form the plural with -í:

bealach - bealaí
cladach - cladaí
soitheach - soithí

éadach - éadaí
mullach - mullaí
orlach - orlaí

Aonach has aontaí*

cúram - cúraimí*

A few words have irregular plurals:

cogadh - cogai

leanbh - leanai

mac - mic

breitheamh - breithiúna

tobar - toibreacha

muileann - muilte

smaoineamh - smaointe

ollamh - ollúna

An Dara Díochlaonadh -- The Second Declension

While the first declension consists entirely of "masculine" nouns -- **firinscneach** -- which end in a broad consonant, the second declension, "feminine" -- **baininscneach** -- with one or two exceptions, mostly end in a slender consonant.

The most common ending for the plural in this group is -a.

cnámh - cnámha
sceach - sceacha
iarsmalann - iarsmalanna
bróg - bróga
lámh - lámha
bréag - bréaga
muc - muca

clann - clanna
fuinneog - fuinneoga
eangach - eangacha
cluas - cluasa
beach - beacha
casóg - casóga

Here is a list of other words which form the plural adding -a.

gaoth
cos
scornach
tinteog
cuileog
dallóg
putóg
leabharlann
cearc
bos
feasóg
scuab
amharclann

cloch
long
bileog
fuiseog
póg
spideog
gasóg
bialann
bábóg
cearc
mear
speal
pictiúrlann

gealach
cláirseach
oínseach
tóirneach

cailleach
girseach
scórnach

A fair number of nouns form their plural by adding **-(e)anna**.

áit - áiteanna
ceist - ceisteanna
scoil - scoileanna
aois - aoiseanna
cóip - cóipeanna
cúis - cúiseanna
feis - feiseanna
cailc - cailceanna
scian - sceana*

caint - cainteanna
páirc - páirceanna
sraíd - sraideanna
céim - céimeanna
cuairt - cuairteanna
duais - duaiseanna
stailc - stailceanna
seilf - seilfeanna

Still more add **-acha** to form the plural:

obair - oibreacha
ubh - uibheacha
feirm - feirmeacha
cistin - cistineacha
maidin - maidineacha
baintreach - baintreacha
ceirt - ceirteacha
stoirm - stoirmeacha

paidir - paidreacha
iníon - iníonacha
craobh - craobhacha
carraig - carraigeacha
nead - neadacha
ubh - uibheacha
feirm - feirmeacha

A few add **-ta (-tha)**:

pian - pianta
tír - tíortha
líon - líonta

spéir - spéirtha
buíon - buíonta
mian - mianta

tonn - tonnta
uair - uaireanta*

gáir - gártha*

Another highly productive plural in this declension is the ending **í**.

pingin - pinginí
seachtain - seachtainí
earraid - earraidí
liathróid - liathróidí
gualainn - guailli*

scilling - scillingí
aisling - aislingí
feoirling - feoirlingí
oifig - oifigí

Plurals in **-e (-te)** also occur:

glúin - glúine
coill - coillte
dúil - dúile

súil - súile
reilig - reilige

There are two masculine nouns which form plurals in **-e**:

sliabh - sléibhte*

teach - tithe*

This declension contains a variety of plural forms, but the vast majority of nouns here form plurals with some form of an ending in **-a**.

An Tríú Díochlaonadh -- The Third Declension

Nouns in this declension end in consonants. They may be masculine or feminine.

A large group of nouns in this declension end in **-óir, -eoir, -úir, -éir** (they designate the 'doer' of an action) or other consonants..

Another large group ends in an **-a**. These two form their plurals by adding an **-(a)í**.

cainteoir - cainteoirí
búisteir - búisteirí
garda - gardaí

bádóir - bádóirí
feirmeoir - feirmeoirí
halla - hallaí

The following nouns follow the same pattern:

múinteoir
stiúrthóir
siopadóir
fiacloir
grianghrafadóir
ceolteoir
airgeadóir
leictreoir
cuntasóir
comhairleoir
bearbóir
saighdiúir
peinteir
baincéir
pianadóir
cláirseoir
polaitheoir

leachtóir
dlidóir
meicneoir
iriseoir
fáilteoir
dathdóir
nuachtóir
bainisteoir
doirseoir
cunsaileir
dochtúir
siúineir
pluiméir
ealaíonadóir
fliuteadóir
muilleoir
dramadóir

aisteoir
garda
ailtíre
gruagaire
moltóir
scríbhneoir
grósaíre
cocaíre
oibreoir
foraoiseoir
baiceir
dugaíre
glantóir
potadóir
airitheoir
díoltóir
buachaill
cailíocht
filíocht
impireacht
cumhacht
tuismitheoir
rás
rud

banaltra
innealtóir
dalta
peileadóir
píolóta
síoltóir
tabhairneoir
briceadóir
bribheir
gníomhaire
craoltóir
fíodóir
seodóir
potigéir
cúntóir
tinceir
beannacht
gluaiseacht
iasacht
mallacht
rincoir
stráinseir
roth
altóir

Other nouns form their plural by adding **-anna**.

rang - ranganna
dath - dathanna
snáth - snáthanna
am - amanna
troid - troideanna

cith - ceathanna
loch - lochanna
bláth - bláthanna
acht - achtanna

Other nouns following the pattern:

ceacht	cíos
cuid (codanna)	dath
guth	sos
tráth	stad
droim (dromanna)	

A few nouns have irregular plurals ending in -acha / -ta/ -a:

anam - anamacha	gleann - gleannta
flaith - flatha	blian - blianta
feoil - feolta	fíon - fíonta

Some nouns ending in -aint, -uint, -irt for the plural by adding an -í:

tiomáint - tiomáintí	taispeáint - taispeáintí
canúint - canúintí	cinniúint - cinniúintí
bagairt - bagairtí	iomáint - iomáintí
eisiúnt - eisiúntí	oiliúnt - oiliúntí
tagairt - tagairtí	buairt - buairtí

An Ceathrú Díochlaonadh -- The Fourth Declension

Most nouns in the fourth declension are masculine.

Nouns which end in **-ín** or **-a** form their plural by adding **-í**.

The same is true for nouns which end in **-e** or **-aire**. The final **-e** is changed to **-í**.

coinín - coiníní
rógaire - rógairí

pláta - plátai
béile - béilí

The words which follow belong to the fourth declension:

baisín
caipín
dreoilín
nóinín
toitín
bona
cota
halla
mála
pionta
siopa
briste
cnaipe
fáinne
aire
dreimire
gairdín
briosca
coláiste

cailín
cruiscín
feirín
sicín
bata
cárta
hata
lapa
nota
píopa
tiarna
ciste
cóiste
file
iascaire
rógaire
bosca
cluiche
freagra

garda
 gúna
 madra
 póca
 seomra
 farraige
 gruagaire
 gníomhaire
 file
 bairín
 bainín
 éinín
 naipcín
 sabhaircín
 cáca
 dalta
 bairille
 pointe
 aiste
 féile
 taille
 timire
 timpiste
 oraiste

gata
 lampa
 páiste
 práta
 faiche
 ailtire
 cócaire
 dúgaire
 cigire
 builín
 cipín
 féirín
 ribín
 sicín
 cófra
 mala
 ciste
 staighre
 cuisle
 gloine
 teachtaire
 paróiste
 oide
 pacáiste

Nouns which end in -í form the plural with **h** -ithe:

rúnáí - rúnaithe
 cruinniú - cruinnithe*

gréasaí - gréasithe

An Cuígiú Díochlaonadh - The Fifth Declension

Most nouns of this group are feminine with some obvious exceptions. Many end in a slender consonant **-in,- il, -ir** or a broad vowel, **-a, -o, -u**.

A large group of nouns here form the plural in **-(e)acha**. There may be the loss of a syllable towards the end of the word when this ending is added. These words will be marked *.

cathair - cathracha*
cabhair - cabhracha*
abhainn - aibhneacha*
leaba - leapacha*

beoir - beoracha
cathaoir - cathaoireach
draein - draenacha

Other words in this group include:

coróin
litir
meabhair
traein
uimhir
deartháir
eorain
nainistir

eochair
lasair
riail
triall
athair
máthair
siúr
treoir

Another group of nouns here form the plural by adding **-na**.

mharsa - comharsana

mí - míonna*

Other words in this group include:

céimseata
pearsa

monarcha
ceathrú

A further cluster of nouns here form the plural by adding -i.

fiche - fichidí
tríocha - tríochaidí
daichead - daichidí
caoga - caogaidí
seasca - seascaidí
seachtó - seachtóidí
ochtó - ochtóidí
nócha - nóchaidí
Nollaig - Nollaigí

Some words here have plural forms which do not easily fit into any of the patterns:

lacha - lachain
cara - cairde
ionga - ingne
talamh - tailte
caora - caoirigh

bráthair - bráithre
namhad - naimhde
teach - tithe
lá - laetheanta
bean - mná

From this listing of the traditional declensions and the forms for the plural, it is clear that there is a lot of duplication from one declension to another. The difference between the declensions is seen in the **genitive** case rather than in the **common** case.

It is also clear that there are a couple of basic endings that may be added for the plural in Irish -- the endings **-í**, **-acha**, **-anna**, **-(t)e**. Masculine nouns ending in a broad consonant form plurals by softening the final consonant. The inflectional endings are found in different declensions; the softened consonant only in the first group.

Don't try to learn "declensions" by heart -- rather, learn the plural form when you learn the singular. Eventually, you will get an understanding of the underlying patterns.



