



# Enjoying the Gifts of Winter, Naturally.

It is a cold December day. A delicate layer of frost edges the corner of each window and mounds of snow smooth over bushes and trees. Birds are huddled under eaves, fluffing their feathers, reminding you that winter is well and truly here. Meanwhile, the kids are hunched behind computer screens, or tapping their feet to the tunes emanating from their hand-held device. And you are thinking, I've just got to figure out some way to get the kids outside!

Try these simple winter activities to help connect your kids with the magic of the winter season.

**It may be a bit counterintuitive but you can make a warm glow out of a chunk of ice. How? By making ice lanterns:**

You'll need round balloons (any size), colored dye (optional), a large bowl, water and tea light candles. If you want to use dye, add a few drops inside the balloon. Attach the balloon to a water faucet and fill to desired size. Tie off the balloon. Put the balloon in a bowl (to keep its round shape) and place it either outside or in a freezer for six hours or until the outside of the balloon is frozen but there is still water inside. Carefully cut and peel away the balloon. Working over a sink or outside, drain the water away by making a hole in the weakest part of the base using a kitchen knife. The hole will have to be large enough to slip over the tea candle. Refreeze the globe until completely solid. Place your candle outdoors and cover with the ice lantern! A series of ice candles on a cold winter's night warms your heart!

**Use touches of nature to decorate a nearby tree. How? By making frozen mandalas:**

Take sprigs of your favourite winter plants (e.g., dogwood, holly, conifer needles). Use a flat and shallow container (e.g., empty tuna

can, Tupperware, etc.). Fill with fresh water. Place your plant inside. Place a twig in the upper middle and allow this to freeze overnight. The next day, gently ease your decoration from the container. Remove the twig. Place a ribbon or twine in the hole and create a loop. This will create a handy hanger. Hang on a tree outside. Watch as the winter side light filters through the beautiful textures of ice and plant material. These sparkling decorations allow us to appreciate nature in a new and fresh way and help us to realize what beauty there is a few steps outside of our door.

**Other Christmastime ideas:**

Head to a local Christmas tree farm and cut down your own tree. A real tree is the most environmentally-friendly choice – far better than a plastic tree. Go for a nature walk the same day and collect natural ornaments with which to decorate the tree. A few ideas include cones, colorful twigs, birch bark, berries, shells, etc. When Christmas is over, use your tree as a backyard shelter for the birds, possibly placing it near your feeder.

Decorate an outside tree (preferably near a window) for the animals and birds. Conifers work well. String pieces of apple, dried fruit, peanuts in the shell and popcorn over the boughs. You can also hang pieces of suet from the tree and pine cones covered in peanut butter and rolled in bird seed. Watch in amazement as wildlife comes to visit your creation. If there is snow, check out the criss-cross of tracks appearing in and around your tree. Wildlife should enjoy Christmas as well!

*Submitted by Jacob Rodenburg, Executive Director of Camp Kawartha, an award-winning outdoor education centre and summer camp.*