

THE BEAUTY OF Winter

Nature Crafts in the Cold

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There is something magical about a winter landscape. If there is snow on the ground, edges become softened, sound is muffled, and the world feels fresh and clean. Even if there isn't any snow, the colour palette of the winter season reveals itself in subtle tones of tans, browns, silvers, and greys.

ICE CANDLES

You can make your own shimmering ice candles that create halos of golden light. When the temperature is well below freezing, fill round balloons with water, securely tie the ends, and place these outside for at least 12 hours; if you can, do this during the night. In the morning, remove the skin of the balloons, flip them upside down and gently knock a hole in one end of each ice globe. Drain any remaining water and what you're left with is a series of lovely ice bowls perfect to house a candle (large tea lights work well). Leave your bowls outside and that evening, place them in a circle with candles in their centres and light them—you'll have a cheerful and warm glow on a cold winter's night!

FROZEN MANDALAS

How do you turn a tree into a glittering symphony of light? By making frozen mandalas of course! You'll need a series of small, flat containers—old tuna cans or sardine tins work well.

For this activity, select a day that's well below freezing. Fill each container with water. Then, collect a series of sprigs (just the very tips), using spruce, cedar, pine, berries, and twigs, artfully placing them into the container. Place a loop of string near the top of each so that the loop will freeze onto your mandalas, providing you with a way to hang them in a nearby tree. Now, place them outside, and when the mandalas are completely frozen pour some hot water over the back of the container and gently release them. You can now hang your mandalas in trees and watch as the winter sun makes them shimmer and dance.

SINTER IN WINTER —SNOW CARVING

On a day when the snow around you is soft and fluffy, fill several old recycling containers (or any plastic container) with snow. Use a shovel to pack it down, add more snow and repeat as necessary until your containers are full of compacted snow, and leave them outside overnight. The snowflakes will *sinter*, meaning that the snow crystals will bond together into a hard-packed medium for you to create wonderful sculptures.

The next day, turn your container over and tap along the bottom and sides to gently ease out your snow block. Use spoons or anything with an edge to begin carving—let your imagination soar. Can you carve a sleeping dog, turtle, snow snake, bunny, or winter gnome? Check out some amazing snow carvings online (Google image search) to get inspired—don't forget to take a picture of your creation and share it too!

Pinecone Feeder

Create your very own bird feeder. All you need is:

- » any kind of pinecone
- » shortening or peanut butter (if you are allergic try peabutter instead)
- » bird seed (mixed, black oil sunflower, or just sunflower all work well)
- » string

Make sure your pinecones are dried and open—this can take up to 24 hours after collecting them. Liberally slather your pinecone with the shortening or alternative, then place the seeds in a bowl and roll the pinecone around several times until the seeds thoroughly coat the cone. Tie a string around the tip and tie it to a nearby tree. Wait a few hours and watch who flutters by for a visit and a snack.



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WINTER BOUQUET

The grey and brittle remains of last summer's field and roadside flowers have a beauty and grace all their own, especially if you take the time to look at them closely. When you're out for a walk, why not snip off a few and make your own winter floral arrangement? Some of the most attractive are dry stalks with seed pods of milkweed, Queen Anne's lace (wild carrot), evening primrose, mullein, burdock, and numerous types of grasses. For a splash of colour try adding some of the fruit that often still lingers on shrubs and vines in late winter (e.g., sumac, mountain ash, or highbush cranberry). **EP**