

WINTER 2009-2010

## WINTER WONDERLAND **ACTIVITY GUIDE**

Your planning guide   
for wintertime family fun



This winter, don't be discouraged by cold weather or gray skies: Take your family outside and create your own Winter Wonderland!

You don't have to go on a week-long skiing trip to keep your clan active. It's all about creativity, a little planning, and a lot of fun! Here's how.

### **Nature Rocks makes it easy!**

With this guide you can find and plan all sorts of fun, healthy, and inexpensive family activities for the chillier days that are upon us. On **NatureRocks.org** you'll find useful tools, tips, and information to help you get into nature without getting over your head. Create unforgettable wintertime memories that your family will want to do every year! Using our guide is simple. You will be able to shut down your computer, bundle up the kids, and get out the door in as little as 5 minutes.

Your Winter Wonderland family fun awaits! 



Brought to you by REI, The Nature Conservancy,  
US Fish and Wildlife Service, American Heart Association  
Children & Nature Network, and ecoAmerica

### WHY

1. Easy and interesting activities inspire wonder.
2. Cold weather provides new opportunities to enjoy fun family time in nature.
3. Getting into nature can help make you and yours happier, healthier, and smarter!

### HOW

1. With this guide, go to **NatureRocks.org** to find activities, destinations, and invite friends.
2. Choose the Winter Wonderland activity that the whole family enjoy.
3. Have fun! Share pictures and blog about your adventures at the **Nature Rocks Facebook** page.

**NatureRocks.org**

GO!

# WINTER WONDERLAND ACTIVITY GUIDE

## PLANNING YOUR ADVENTURES



### Select your Activities

We've got bushels of them. Enter the age(s) of your kid(s), your preferred location, and how much time you have in the **Activity Finder** on NatureRocks.org and we'll give you plenty of rockin' ideas to choose from. Or, you can check out our **fun winter ideas on the next pages!**



### Find Nature

Nature is closer than you think! All you have to do is enter your ZIP code or city and state in the **Find Nature** tool on NatureRocks.org then press Go! and we'll show you great places to get your nature on, plus other information such as tour guide services and where you can get gear if you need it.



### Invite Others

Turn your winter activities into **wonderland parties**. Invite other families using the **Nature Rocks invitation**, by connecting on the **Nature Rocks Facebook page**, or by creating your own **Nature Rocks Flock!** Check out the **Connect page** on NatureRocks.org to find out how.

## KEY TO FINDING YOUR PERFECT WONDERLAND ACTIVITY

**Got snow? No?** No matter where you live, you can find your perfect wonderland activity. On the next few pages, you will see the following critters that help you to determine whether the activity is great for no snow, some snow, snow or any of the above!

Never Snows	Some Snow	Snow



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# WINTER WONDERLAND ACTIVITY GUIDE

## 30-Minute Wonders

*You don't have to have a whole week – or even a whole weekend to get your families outside and create your own unforgettable Winter Wonderland/ Here are some GREAT ways to get outside when you're strapped for time!*

### Walking in a Winter Wonderland

Take a winter nature walk! Look for wintering birds, berries, tracks, and tunnels. Visit a pond and see what's moving beneath the water. Check on muskrat and beaver lodges.

#### Tips

1. Dress the kids warmly in layers (wool and fleece are better than cotton).
2. Bring along snacks and a Thermos of hot cocoa for warming everyone up.
3. Try taking a walk each week. As winter wanes, you'll enjoy seeing the spreading signs of spring!

### Winter Safari

Here's a fun way to get your kids out on a cold day. Sneak outside with a dozen or so of their stuffed animals and hide them in your yard—up in trees, inside shrubs, on top of logs, and so on. Now tell them it's time to go on a wild animal safari! They'll be surprised and delighted to find their beloved wild creatures in these unfamiliar places. And who knows, maybe they'll stumble across some real wild creatures while they're at it!

#### Tips

1. Don't forget to dress everyone in nice warm layers.
2. Outfit each child with a pair of binoculars.

### Go Green

This winter, make a wreath by gathering branches and twigs of greenery. Spread out the greens on mantels, tabletops, and banisters. Or decorate a wreath frame. You can also add berries, pinecones, ribbons, and more.

#### Tips

1. Do your collecting in your yard or on public lands where collecting is allowed.
2. Your best bet is to collect fir, yew, boxwood, holly, or juniper, especially for indoor arrangements.
3. Wreath frames are available at local crafts stores.

### Meals on the Fly

Help area birds make it through the winter by making simple bird feeders. Try rolling pinecones in peanut butter and sprinkling with birdseed. Or fill orange halves (minus the fruit) with birdseed and hang from tree branches.

#### Tips

1. Hang your feeders near a big window so you can keep track of which birds visit.
2. Have your kids draw pictures of the visiting birds in their own bird journal.



## on BEING ACTIVE:

- *Experts say that what kids want more than anything else is time with their parents. To give them that, don't just send them out to play — go play with them!*
- *Offer alternative activities to TV or video games. You might consider shooting some hoops, walking the dog or exploring a nearby park.*
- *Practice what you preach. Your kids won't accept being restricted to two hours of TV watching if you can veg out for four hours. The best way to influence your kids' behavior is through examples. Remember, you can do it!*



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## 1-Hour Winter Fun

*It's amazing what you can do in an hour. Help make your kids happier, healthier and smarter with these creative activities!*

### Track and Field

After the next new snowfall, head outside and look for fresh animal tracks. Can you see where squirrels, mice, rabbits, cats, and birds have crossed the snow? Follow the tracks to see where they go.

#### Tips

1. Have your kids make a map of all the tracks they see covering one area. When you get home, have them use field guides to identify the tracks.
2. Spend some time analyzing the tracks. Can you tell a story to describe what happened here?

### Running Time

No need to give up rousing games of tag just because it's winter. Play different variations of winter tag—snow tag, shadow tag, and more.

#### Tips

1. To play snow tag, follow regular tag rules. Decide if someone can be freed by having another play crawl under his or her legs.
2. To play shadow tag, have the person who's it get others out by stepping on their shadow. Best for a sunny day!

### Ice Escapades

Take your little ones out when sun is melting the edges of your nearest pond or puddle, and let them do some stomping! Kids love to hear ice squeak and crack. Or let them break up chunks of icy snow and make winter pizza!

#### Tips

1. This activity works best where ice has formed over water less than an inch deep. Stay away from deeper ponds and streams.
2. Give everyone a big stick to pound on frozen puddles.

### The Three Little Twigs

Gather twigs from three (or more!) trees outdoors. You'll see that they can be shiny or hairy, thin or stout, with branches opposite or alternate, and so on. Pass them out to the kids in your group and go on a treasure hunt to see if they can find a tree that matches each twig.

#### Tips

1. Midwinter is the perfect time to collect twigs. Use garden shears to cut them carefully from the end of the branch.
2. Start a tree journal. Tape each twig to a piece of paper and write the name of the tree on that page. Sketch out the tree's shape on another day. Come spring, you can add a bud and a leaf!



## on seasonal NATURE NEAR YOU

*The natural world is never static.*

*As the days get shorter and colder, birds migrate south to Conservancy preserves.*

*The leaves start to turn on Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina. Elk come down from the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming.*

*During the winter, millions of songbirds and waterfowl shelter in the warm waters of Mexico's Laguna Madre.*

*Learn about these seasonal wonders and how you can see them in person. To get started, visit the **Nature Events Almanac** at*

<http://www.nature.org/aboutus/travel/almanac/index.php>



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# WINTER WONDERLAND ACTIVITY GUIDE

## Half- or Whole-Day Winter Wonder

*The more time you spend outdoors with your kids, the better off they will be! Be grateful for those weekends when you can spend a half or a whole day outdoors! Here are some super fun, easy ways to spend your time!*

### Build Your Own White House

If conditions are right, build a snow den with your kids. Pile snow, excavate a wide entrance, and shovel out a space to sit. You may find it's even warm enough to sit inside for a few...well, minutes!

#### Tips

1. Have the kids jump on the snow mound before you build to be sure the snow is packed tight.
2. Put foot-long sticks into the top of the mound before you start excavating. When you hit a stick, you know you've dug far enough (you want walls that are thick enough to be strong but not so thick they could harm someone if they collapse).
3. Make snow furniture for your cave!

### The Ice Is Right

Help your kids make winter ice sculpture! Gather a bunch of beach pails or other containers. Fill the containers with water, let them freeze, then remove the ice blocks inside. Use the blocks to build castles, houses, towers, and more.

#### Tips

1. Spray the inside of the pails with non-stick cooking spray (it helps get the ice out).
2. Ice cubes from the freezer make nice architectural details.

### That Shore Is Cold!

Who says summer is the best season to visit the beach? Try bundling up everyone on a day that's cold but not frigid, and take them to the nearest beach. Does the beach look different in winter? Are any hardy birds still racing with the waves? Whose tracks can you see in the sand? Don't forget to keep a lookout for a bobbing seal or other marine mammal!

#### Tips

1. Definitely dress everyone in warm, waterproof boots in case the waves catch you off guard.
2. Remember: Winter's a great time to find beautiful seashells!

### There's No Creatures Like Snow Creatures

Who says snowmen are the only things you can make out of snow? Turn your winter backyard into a wildlife wonderland by making snow animals.

#### Tips

1. Consider making a rabbit, a beaver, a fox, a squirrel, or other animals you really could see at this time of year.
2. Can you find the tracks of any real wintering animals outside?



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## On FAMILY SNOWSHOEING

*Snowshoeing started thousands of years ago as a mode of transportation, and has evolved into a popular winter activity for families. Here's why:*

***It's fun:** Snowshoeing can be a social activity! Kids and adults, beginners and seasoned veterans alike, can all enjoy it!*

***It's easy:** As the saying goes, "If you can walk, you can snowshoe!"*

***It's inexpensive:** Snowshoeing will not break your budget. Required gear includes the snowshoes themselves, appropriate footwear and clothing, and (usually) a pair of poles. That's it!*

***It's versatile:** Snowshoeing can be as gentle or as adventurous as you'd like. And, you can snowshoe many trails that you can't ski due to trees or low-snow conditions.*

# WINTER WONDERLAND ACTIVITY GUIDE

## NATURE ROCKS WINTER GAMES

Here are more ways to get active outdoors in the winter. Check out these games online and then get outside and have fun.

### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Neighborhood Explorers

Hey kids! The Fish and Wildlife Service has a fun way for you to discover new things about your own neighborhood! It's a game you play on your computer first, then go outside and discover what you learned about.



The game is called **Neighborhood Explorers**. In it, you can seek and identify birds by silhouette, learn about endangered and invasive species, find Sam the praying mantis, and more!

Explorers can create nature reports and see their state's Top Explorer. You earn patches as you complete projects, answer trivia questions, and play games. Action projects include building bird houses, planting native plants, and more.

Visit the Neighborhood Explorers website at <http://www.fws.gov/neighborhoodexplorers>

### American Heart Association Cryptozoo

#### THE GREAT CHASE

##### Leave a trail of mysterious cryptid tracks

Scout out a park, plaza, or neighborhood you think it would be fun to run through. Then, leave a trail of mysterious tracks.

Make your tracks go around poles, up steps, under railings, along ledges, over benches, or anywhere else you think would make for a fun adventure. You can use any kind of chalk, and you can draw tracks by hand or with a stencil.

A really great cryptid chase is about a mile long. But you can make shorter or longer chases.

After you've laid down the tracks, invite friends to meet you at the starting point. Cryptid chases are most fun when run in teams of 2-4, but you can have a bunch of teams follow the trail one at a time.



Find tracks and cryptid characters at <http://cryptozoo.ning.com>



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## WINTER WONDERLAND ACTIVITY GUIDE

### NATURE ROCKS SAFETY TIPS

- Layer on warm clothes, including coats, hats, and gloves (wool and silk are warmer than cotton)
- Keep those bottles and children full of water
- Take along snacks for those always-hungry nature rockers
- Summon your super-parent power - bring along maps, a compass, GPS, extra clothes, flashlight, first aid kit, and other safety items. Minimize your load to maximize the fun.

*While it's important to learn to maximize the health benefits of nature experiences, it's also important to minimize health risks. Inform yourself of and alert children to any unsafe areas or conditions, presented by nature or humans, that may be present in the areas you intend to visit. You should also be aware of your party's physical limitations. Consult your doctor and online sources, including a good Web site on healthful camping and hiking offered by the Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/OutdoorSafety/>.*

### NATURE ROCKS GEAR FOR ROCKIN' NATURE IN STYLE

**T-Shirts for everybody! Hats, water bottles, journals, and more!**

**At [Zazzle.com/NatureRocks](http://Zazzle.com/NatureRocks)**



**At [CafePress.com/NatureRocksShop](http://CafePress.com/NatureRocksShop)**



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# Nature Rocks Resources

## Find us on the web

- Web: [NatureRocks.org](http://NatureRocks.org)
- Facebook: [facebook.com/naturerocks](https://facebook.com/naturerocks)
- Twitter: [@NatureRocks](https://twitter.com/NatureRocks)
- Flickr: [flickr.com/nature\\_rocks](https://flickr.com/nature_rocks)
- Get Nature Rocks T-shirts: [zazzle.com/naturerocks](https://zazzle.com/naturerocks)
- Get stickers, onesies, journals, Sigg bottles, Flip cameras, hats, and bags: [cafepress.com/naturerocksshop](https://cafepress.com/naturerocksshop)
- Get the book that re-started nature fun, “**Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder**” at [richardlouv.com](http://richardlouv.com)

*Happier  
Healthier  
Smarter*

## Nature Rocks Partners



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Nature Rocks thanks all of our fabulous partners and ambassadors for contributing to this guide and for helping us to get families outside to rock nature

