

## Fun Winter Activities to Help Wildlife

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

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I'd like to wish all of my readers a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa, plus good wishes for a Happy Holiday for any other festivity you may celebrate!

This being late December, there's not a lot of gardening people are doing right now (although if you want to go out and turn the compost pile before dinner, that would be cool). And this being southern Indiana, it's not like we can just send the kids outside to play in the snow all week. But there are still many family-oriented things that we can do that are fun, educational, and may benefit our wild furry and feathered friends.

Homemade bird feeders are always a hit with children. All you need is some birdseed, peanut butter, and some sort of object to hold the seed: pine cones and cookie cutters work great! Smear the pine cone with peanut butter, then roll it in a pan of birdseed. Tie a piece of ribbon to the cone, and then hang it on a tree or shrub near a window.

Older children might enjoy making a wildlife journal. They can record what birds or other animals they see at their feeders. They can identify the bird using a variety of books or websites, describe its colors, and even draw pictures of their find.

If we do get snow, it's always fun to look at the tracks left by birds and other creatures that visit your yard. Again, there are books and websites that will help you identify your visitor by the tracks they leave behind.

Our local environmental science sites are a great way to spend a cold, winter day. Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve, located at 551 North Boeke Road in Evansville, has indoor activities all week for all age groups. Plus, it's a great place to hike the trails and see signs of winter animal activity.

Mesker Park Zoo and Botanical Garden, located at 1545 Mesker Park Drive in Evansville, has many indoor facilities that are warm and educational. The Amazonia Building can make you forget all about winter! Or take the kids to Angel Mounds State Historic Site at 8215 Pollack Avenue in Evansville, and learn how the early inhabitants of the tri-state lived. Downtown Evansville hosts several museums and historic sites that are also worth visiting.

In case you decide to start undecorating your Christmas tree this week, please note that our annual Holiday Recycling Day will be Saturday, January 7. I'll have more details in next week's column, but for certain, we will be chipping up Christmas trees into mulch, plus accepting other recyclable materials.

For more information on winter wildlife and gardening, please contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287.