

Snow Day—Spend It Outdoors

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

“Silence and curiosity are the two most important things you can take with you on a nature walk” Gale Lawrence

Snow days. They’re a chance to sleep in, stay in, read, bake, wear pajamas all day, watch movies, make hot chocolate... or a chance to get outdoors. Once you get past the initial steps of coats, boots, gloves and that first blast of cold air, there are quiet moments and beauties that are well worth the effort.

It gives you a chance to look at the bare bones of your landscape. You can see what stands out, whether it’s grasses, conifers, shrubs with berries, the bark or branching structure of trees and shrubs or, moving in closer, pinecones or lichens. You can see where the pathways are and, sometimes, where they “ought” to be instead. It’s a great time to see how many different critters your landscape is home to, since even the smallest birds and mammals will leave their tracks in a fine snow. If you’re quiet enough, and can find a good place to remain still for awhile, you might even see them in action. And if you’re a night owl and go out at midnight instead of during the day, you will see even more. A lot of animals are nocturnal; some find it safer under the cover of darkness, while owls take advantage of decreased competition from hawks and other predators.

Bird nests are more visible this time of year. Bluejays and robins aren’t afraid of humans so they tend to nest close to roads and houses; robins usually at the tops of trees and bluejays tend to prefer conifers. You’re less likely to find the homes of bluebirds, chickadees, woodpeckers and nuthatches since they’re cavity nesters, but they’re probably nearby. Though nests would seem necessary for winter warmth, they’re used only from egg-laying to departure of chicks. The rest of the year, birds settle down to sleep or “roost” in safe, warm places with dense brush or foliage.

If you want to be more physical, the chances for exertion are endless: hiking, snowshoeing, making snow angels, cross country skiing, ice skating, making a snowman, dog-walking, playing snow soccer, ice fishing, sledding, flashlight tag, building a fort, having a snowball fight and did we mention shoveling? If your own yard doesn’t tire you out, your neighbors will be more than happy for the effort. There’s no need for a gym on a snow day, just step out the door.

Karma Larsen, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, plantnebraska.org

