

## WONDERFUL WINTER

*A prod of aloes, leaves like beaks, pecking at the sky. John Roff.*

It is easy for children to understand the full significance of winter as the changes are so obvious. We layer our clothes and cuddle up in gloves, scarves, beanies and hats, thermal underwear and boots and sometimes wear our slippers 'til noon. Here are some special winter activities for the whole family:

Walks in the winter time – admire the bare branches, shapes and silhouettes of deciduous trees and trace their naked beauty and collect leaves for leaf collages and rubbings. Enjoy the bright colours of aloes, red hot poker and wild dagga (*Leonotis*) and linger at these flowers to watch the bees and sunbirds as they visit them. Enjoy the receding pinkness and blueness of the sky in early morning and afternoon heralding in the morning and night. The best time to spot animals and birds in a nature reserve is in the winter when there is little foliage to obscure your view.

At home and in the garden – make a thick and tasty soup with your children; bake bread and enjoy these at supper time; warm chocolate drinks and making s'mores (toasted marshmallows sandwiched between Marie biscuits) on an open fire. Take the time at which the sun rises and sets and calculate the number of daylight hours; measure the temperature in the early morning and at noon; measure rainfall. Rake up the leaves and use them as mulch on the flower beds to keep the soil warm and moist. With the abundance of fruit make lemon juice and to scare away the winters sniffles and enjoy other citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit, naartjies and limes). Observe how the plants change in the garden – have some completely hidden themselves lying dormant below the soil and has the frost burnt any of the leaves here and there?

Take a closer look at your cat and dog – their fur will become thicker to chase away the winter chills. If you live on a farm the coats of your horses and cows will also become thicker and be sure to give them a warm place to rest at night out of the cold wind.

For the birds - Make a bird feeder and be sure to fill it every day as the birds come to rely on this source of food. Offer a variety of food as some birds are carnivores and others are vegetarian – learn about the birds and what their special diets are and do not feed them bread. Make sure there is water in a safe place for them to drink

At night – the stars reveal themselves early and this is a perfect time to nip outside for a while to enjoy their beauty and patterns and see who can find the first star to show itself.

We patiently wait for the days to get longer, the layers of clothes to become less, look out for the first blossoms and leaves of bulbs to push through the soil for the first signs of spring.

Article compiled by Jeanette Stewart at "Learning Through Nature" 033 330 5980  
079 184 5011 {HYPERLINK "mailto:enviro.education@telkomsa.net"}, Website: {HYPERLINK "http://www.learningthroughnature.co.za"}

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