

Winter Gardening Activities for ECE Sites



Once the growing season is over, there are still many chores to be done and exciting ways to engage children in outdoor learning. Here are a few of our favorite winter garden activities.



Putting the Garden To Bed

- Rake up old plant material to prevent disease, remove stems from annuals and veggies.
- Mulch, mulch, mulch! Give your garden a nice blanket for its long winter nap
 - Choose appropriate mulches for your needs. Straw and leaves on the beds, wood chips for pathways, etc.
 - Find free or cheap mulch at the city or county compost lot, or from arborists looking to share chips.
- Leave stems on native and perennial plants! Insects use them for winter homes.
- Leave the leaves! They provide insulation, nutrients, and a home for critters over the winter.

- Set up bee hotels.
- Add bird feeders with appropriate, non-invasive seeds.
- Drain and put away hoses to avoid freezing.
- Clean and store tools.
- Sing a goodnight song as you put the garden to bed.

Outdoor Winter Activities

- Plant ID
- Animal observation & tracking
- Snowshoeing
- Maple tapping (Feb-March)
- Art activities
 - Ice art
 - Found art collage (leaves, acorns, etc.)



Outdoor Growing in Winter

- Plant garlic in October.
 - Choose an area that won't be disturbed until July of next year.
- Tulips and daffodils may be planted before hard frost, and are a great early spring surprise!
 - Try planting them in a heart or smiley face if you have space
- Cold frames
 - Can be made cheaply with old windows or PVC
 - Greens and cabbage can grow through most winter weather
- Hoop houses
 - Slightly more involved, but can help extend seasons in both fall and spring
- Cover crops
 - Best for larger beds. Research your crops to avoid aggressive grasses.



Indoor Growing

- Grow lights
- Sprouts
- Mushrooms
- Windowsill planters
 - Best for low light plants like lettuce
- Seed starting for the garden in February and March
 - Grow shelf kits are pretty affordable, ideal for starting transplants
- Take cuttings of outdoor herbs to keep them growing indoors
- Partner with a local farmer or Ag class to share greenhouse space

Indoor Activities

- Seed saving and sorting
- Guess the seed game
- Food preservation
- Drying, freezing, and fermentation are ideal for young learners, without the high heat of pressure canning.
- Cooking and baking
 - [WI Chili lunch](#)
 - [Harvest of the Month](#)
 - Seasonal winter recipes from [Celebrating Seasonality](#)
- Potatoes, winter squash, and seed corn are great veggies to learn about this time of year.
- Orange and clove ornaments, etc
- Seed catalog collages.
- Planning for next season's garden.
- Making signs for the garden
- Making bee houses and [bird feeder cones](#).
- And of course, books, imaginative play, and guest speakers (family and community members who want to lead activities like snowshoeing, preserving foods, finger knitting, etc.)
 - Winter is the perfect time for stories about hibernation, cultural practices, and cozy foods
 - *Over and Under the Snow* and *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt* by Kate Messner
 - [Multicultural book list](#)



Questions? Comments? Get in touch!

Reach out to us at Rooted at wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org -- we'd love to provide support for your gardening adventures! Visit our website at rootedwi.org for more Farm to ECE resources.

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