

Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 30 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea from PLT that introduces the concept of **seasons**.

Early Childhood Activity 6: Evergreens in Winter

Evergreen trees offer a sensory overload! Through these experiences, children will touch, smell, see, hear, and taste the season of winter. Consider trying these experiences year-round in areas with or without snow.

Doing the Activity

Bundle up and enjoy a stroll around your yard, neighborhood, local park, or evergreen forest. On your winter walks, try the following:

- Stop and listen to the sounds of winter (e.g., wind or snow under feet). Ask: *How does our walk sound, smell, or look different from the last time we walked? What is the same?*
- Search on the ground for cones. Look up high in the trees for cones still on them. Look at the branches and knobs on deciduous trees. With the leaves gone, these shapes are easier to see.
- Find places that are out of the wind (e.g., close to a building or next to a tree or hedge). Ask: *If you were an animal outside in winter, where would you stay?* Search on the ground for tracks and other animal signs.
- Search for animal homes in deciduous trees. Nests and holes should be more visible now. Look for evidence of ways animals survive in winter.
- Lie down under evergreens, and look up through the branches. Talk about the visible patterns, and experience the way evergreens provide shelter from wind, rain, and snow.
- Look for the whorls of branches on conifers, such as pine, spruce, and fir. Each year, the tree adds a new whorl of branches. You can estimate the age of the tree by counting the whorls. Add two or three years to represent the first few years of growth before the tree started making whorls.

Winter Treats

Mix one part peanut butter (or suet, if available) with five parts corn meal and pack the mixture into the crevices of a large pinecone. This Audubon-approved, all-season mixture will attract woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, and warblers.



DID YOU KNOW?

To conserve energy during cold West Virginia winters, ruffed grouse will “snow roost.” The ruffed grouse will burrow into snow drifts at least 10 inches deep to create “snow caves,” making the grouse less visible to predators and protecting them from the wind and cold.

Once back inside, prepare and enjoy some hot tea or cocoa, and remind children that these tasty treats also come from trees! Plan to visit the trees again in the spring to look for new growth.

Adapted from Activity 6: Evergreens in Winter from Project Learning Tree’s *Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood* guide.

Discover how PLT can help you teach... from nature!

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- Contact your West Virginia PLT State Coordinator: Cinda Francis, cfrancis@wvadventures.net or toll-free at (888) 372-9663.

www.plt.org



Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation.