

Winter Season

Cold weather, heavy snow and ice accumulation, and wind chill characterize winter. Perennial (many growing seasons) plants go dormant to survive winter; the dormant period is like a deep sleep until the weather becomes warmer. Leaves dropping is a result of the nutrients in the plant moving from the leaves to be stored in the stem and roots. Some animals, such as groundhogs, also hibernate (deep sleep), and some will gain as much weight to prepare for winter, such as white-tail deer. Winter season starts mid-December and ends mid-March; days will become shorter, and nights will become longer.



Are you ready for an adventure?

Use the activities and supplies in this backpack to explore Otter Creek Lake & Park with your group. This backpack includes materials for up to 4 people in your group. When you're done, return the supplies and the backpack and clean up any activities you completed. Remember, the best way to keep our park clean is by leaving no trace! Then, make plans to visit another park in one of Iowa's 99 counties! Can you visit them all? Get the full list at www.traveliowa.com/99parks.

Spring Season Park-Pack Supplies:

- **Scavenger Hunt /Autumn Crossword Puzzle**
 - ✓ Pens
 - ✓ Activity sheets
- **Hiking Activities**
- **Crafts**
 - ✓ Paper
 - ✓ Crayons
 - ✓ Plastic spoon
 - ✓ Rubber band
 - ✓ Pom-poms
 - ✓ Multi-purpose glue
- **Recommended readings:**
 - ✓ *Over and Under the Snow*
 - ✓ *It's Winter*
 - ✓ *Guide to Common Trees & Shrubs of Iowa*
 - ✓ Tama Co. brochure
- **Rock Collection Activity**
 - ✓ 4 Containers
 - ✓ 4 Magnifying glasses

Caution

All activities included in this Park-Pack should be done under the supervision of an adult. To have an incredible nature adventure, don't forget to wear sunscreen and insect repellent. Check the forecast and make an emergency plan if necessary. Dress appropriately for the weather, especially during winter and summer, and do not put yourself (willingly) in any dangerous situation. Last, but not least, always respect our parks; one of the best ways to do so is by leaving no trace and picking up after yourself; also, don't forget to have lots of fun!

Beware



Wild or yellow parsnip is a wild invasive plant from Europe/Asia. It contains a chemical in sap/juice (found in seeds, stems, leaves, and flowers). When exposed to sunlight, contact with the skin could cause localized skin burns and blisters. This plant is more commonly found in summer and spring, but oil is just as strong in the winter and fall.

[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](#)



Tut Underwood/SC Public Radio

Poison ivy contains an oil called urushiol, which some people might be allergic to. Touching any part of the plant can cause red, swollen skin, blisters, and severe itching. A saying to help identify this plant is "leaves of three, let it be." This plant is more commonly found in summer and spring, but oil is just as strong in the winter and fall.

SUMMER SENSORY SCAVENGER HUNT

LISTEN FOR



LOOK FOR



FEEL



OBSERVE BIRDS AT LAKE

LOOK FOR A
SNOWFLAKE AND
OBSERVE IT

FIND
ANIMAL
TRACKS

LOOK FOR TREES WITH
LEAVES



STOP AND
OBSERVE YOUR
BREATH

CREATE A
MINI-
SNOWMAN

FIND WATER IN ITS SOLID FORM



VISIT THE NATURE CENTER,
COME SEE THE EXHIBIT
ROOM!

FIND A NON-HIBERNATING MAMMAL



WINTER TREE CRAFT

Materials: paper & glue

1. Collect a couple of sticks; smaller sticks will work better for this activity and collect at least one slightly bigger to be the tree's trunk; you can also collect dried grass.
 - Collect sticks that are on the ground to not disturb plants.
2. Once you have a couple of sticks for your tree, arrange them to make the design you would like it to have.
3. Lastly, use glue to put your tree together!

GEOCACHING

Part scavenger, part hike, geocaching will catch the interest of adventurous older kids and adults. Use a GPS unit, such as your phone, to find hidden treasures. Join the millions of geocachers worldwide! Learn more at www.geocaching.com/play.

1. Search for and download the free Geocaching app to your phone. Create an account and log in.
2. Look at a map of your area. Click on green geocaches. To see more details, click on the name of the cache.
 - Tip: look for caches that are low difficulty and terrain. A "regular" sized cache is probably a small plastic container, they are easier to find than a "micro" which is likely a film canister or smaller. Micro caches probably only contain a log to sign and date. Regular caches usually contain a log as well as tradeable "swag." Leave an item, trade an item!
3. Follow the coordinates to the general area and then start searching! Look for items out of place.
4. Check in tree stumps. Search high and low.
5. Consider the season. Dress appropriately to prevent from getting too cold. Tall grasses make caches more challenging to find.

PRACTICE ROCK SORTING

Materials: containers & magnifying glass

1. As you walk around Otter Creek Lake & Park, collect rocks.
2. When you stop for a rest, sort your collection.
 - Shape
 - Color
 - Size
 - Texture
3. After observing rocks, put them back where they were obtained (if possible) or somewhere safe to do so on the park grounds.

NATURE LAUNCHER

Materials: pom-pom (or small snowballs), plastic spoon, sticks (2), rubber band or hair tie

1. **Find** two sticks, each 8-12 inches long. One stick must have a straight appearance and at least ½ inch thick. The other should be about 1 inch thick.
2. **Use** the rubber band to connect the end of the spoon to the straight stick. The spoon should be facing up.
3. **Wedge** the thicker stick between the straight stick and the spoon.
4. **To launch:**
 - Place one hand on the straight stick to steady the launcher. Place pom-pom (or acorn) on the spoon.
 - With one finger push the spoon down and let go to launch.
 - Why do pom-poms launch farther away than snowballs? What adjustments can you make to your launcher to increase the distance the snowball flies?
5. **Safety tip:** Adults should help support, create, and carefully supervise launchers.

HIKE A TRAIL

- **I spy-** One person chooses an object and gives clues until others guess the object.
- **I'm going on trip and bringing...** the first player answers, "Apple," the next player says, "I'm going on a trip and bringing an apple and binoculars." The next player must add something beginning with "C" and so on through the alphabet. The answers will probably get sillier as you go.
- **"How many"** questions- How many birds can we see? How many squirrels? How many streams have we crossed? How many steps until the log up ahead? How many ponds are there at Otter Creek Lake & Park? How many trails are there at Otter Creek Lake & Park?
- **Tree Huggers-**This activity is like musical chairs but with built-in tree identification. One person serves as the "Tree Master." As you're hiking the Tree Master calls out the name of a tree (oak, for example). Everyone then runs and hugs an oak tree. The last one to run and hug an oak tree is out. Continue until only one person remains. The last person will be the new Tree Master.