

Five Good Reasons
By Heather Bryant, Extension Educator, Agricultural Resources

I don't know about you, but I like spring and I always hope that Punxsutawney Phil of Groundhog Day fame will predict an early one. I didn't expect him to, and of course he did not. He saw his shadow, and predicted 6 more weeks of winter.

It begs the question, why do we ask a groundhog about the weather anyway? I did a little research and the tradition came to us from the Pennsylvania Dutch (or German) settlers. Early Christians in Europe had a holiday called Candlemas, which is the halfway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. Celtic tradition observed a similar holiday called Imbolc. Tradition held that if the day was sunny and warm, winter would continue and if the day was stormy, winter would be coming to an end. The Romans then took this lore to the early Germans who added the idea that on a sunny day an animal like a badger or hedgehog would see his/her shadow but not on a stormy day. When the settlers came to the Northeastern United States, they found that groundhogs are more common here than badgers and hedgehogs so the lore evolved again.

Ancient wisdom and lore about the natural world fascinate me even if they do not always tell me what I want to hear. So if, like me, you were disappointed with Phil's forecast, here are five good reasons for the cold and the snow to continue a little while longer.

- 1.) Many insects and plant diseases that attack our crops and gardens can't survive the cold and the snow of a normal New Hampshire winter.
- 2.) A good snow cover will protect many plants, notably berries, from frost damage.
- 3.) Abnormal weather patterns can cause plant and animal life cycles to get out of sync. For example, if an early spring leads to early migration or baby birds being hatched too early the insects or other resources they normally feed on may not be available when they are needed.
- 4.) Ice fishermen need ice, winter enthusiasts like snow, and loggers need it so that they can move equipment around in the forest. Making them all happy is good for our economy.
- 5.) Maple producers need predictable weather patterns so that they can be ready when the sap begins to run.

So, give a sigh of resignation, make another cup of cocoa, put your feet up, and wait it out in front of the fire while reading your seed catalogs.

Look for next week's column by our winter loving County Forester, David Falkenham.

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