

Wintertime Means Family Fun

By Deborah Maes, Extension Educator for Family & Consumer Resources

Our New Hampshire four-season climate offers plenty of opportunities for families to spend time together, both indoors and outside. Outdoor lovers have a wonderful playground here within the mountains, rivers and valleys of Grafton County. Since there are snowflakes in the air and the temperature is below freezing, let's focus on family winter fun.

Our winters are traditionally long and cold. If your family has a young hockey player, skier or figure skater you may find yourself traveling all over the region attending practices and competitions. Before you hit the road, explore what other activities the area has for the down times. Are there trails for cross country treks or hikes on snowshoes? Maybe your family loves to downhill ski. We have some of the state's best ski areas that cater to athletes of all ages and abilities.

Also consider some traditionally summertime activities that can be adapted for winter fun, many can be done in your own back yard. Why not have a cookout complete with hot dogs and s'mores over an open fire? Consider packing a lunch and blanket, then hike up a local hill to view the scenery. You might come across some animal tracks in the snow so bring along a guidebook and make the experience fun as well as educational. Be sure to take along a camera or sketch book to record wonderful memories.

If you prefer quieter, indoor pursuits, or are like me and are not fond of being cold, explore family activities that can be done inside. Hunt through your closets and find that stash of board games. Visit the craft aisle in your favorite store and pick up some supplies. When you are snowed in you can teach your children the activities you learned as a child. Spend time pouring over the pictures you took during the summer and put them together in a book. As you look over the pictures, share stories about what you remember from that day.

Winter is the perfect time to teach some simple cooking skills. What better occasion than a snowstorm to make a pot of nice hot chicken vegetable soup, a simple batch of biscuits, and some fruit cobbler? Kids can learn valuable life skills such as measuring, reading recipes, the proper handling of kitchen tools, and kitchen safety. At the end of the project your children will experience the pride of eating something delicious that they had a hand in making. Make sure you take pictures of the finished meal for the next scrapbook session, and let them know that you expect their help during clean-up.

The next time you get measurable snowfall, hand out the shovels and clear the paths together. Then keep active by building a snowman, making snow angels, creating a snow fort and engaging the whole family in a traditional snow ball fight. Consider putting some food coloring and water into a spray bottle to decorate the fort. Or be like my neighbor's grown daughters who recently created a fish snow sculpture in their front yard. What fun they must have had and what a treat for us driving by each day.



When kids get tired of traditional winter activities or it is just too cold outside, consider my friend Ann's idea. Her cellar was warm enough so she placed her summer wading pool on the concrete floor, filled it up with warm water and let her daughter splash around in her bathing suit. Once the activity was over, she drained the water down the sump pump hole, mopped up the floor, and headed back upstairs.

Your goals for winter fun should be many: keeping the kids physically active, creating some great family fun activities, learning new skills, and showing everyone that you don't have to spend a lot of money to have a good time. Soon enough they will retreat to the television, MP3 Player, video games or computer time. Make sure they have some family activities to talk or IM their friends about.

If you want a copy of the recipes mentioned in this article e-mail our office at: grafton@ceunh.unh.edu.

Simple and Easy Fruit Cobbler

1/3 cup butter or oleo
1 cup milk
1 cup sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 cup flour (can use half white and half whole wheat flours)
1 can pie filling or package of frozen fruit

Melt butter in a 13"x9" pan. Mix together milk, sugar, baking powder and flour. Pour over melted butter. Spoon the contents of one can of pie filling (reduced sugar options are available) or one package of frozen mixed fruit. Bake at 350°F for 40-45 minutes. Serve with ice cream or fresh whipped cream.

Biscuits

2 cups flour (can use combination of white and wheat)
1 Tbsp of baking powder
½ tsp salt
¼ cup solid shortening
2/3 cup milk

Mix flour, baking powder and salt together. If you have fresh or dried herbs, you can add them at this time. Cut the shortening into the flour mixture with a pastry blender, knives or use a food processor—remember not to over mix. Stir in enough milk to make a soft dough. Place on a floured surface and knead gently 8-10 times. Pat or roll into a circle about ½ inch thick and then using a floured glass or cutter cut out the dough. Consider using cookie cutters for special shapes. Place onto baking sheet and cook for 15 minutes in a 450°F oven. Serve warm.

Chicken-Vegetable Soup

6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
2 cups cooked chicken, chopped
Chopped vegetables of your choice: onion, potato, celery, carrots, turnip, beans, parsnip, etc
Seasonings

Boil the broth and add chopped chicken. Cut the vegetables in to small pieces and place vegetables into the chicken and broth mixture. They should cook in about 20-30 minutes. Season with parsley, bay leaves, oregano, salt, pepper and enjoy.

*If you want your soup to be thicker, mix ¼ cup flour thoroughly into ¾ cup cold water and pour into the boiling soup mixture while stirring. Soup will thicken quickly.

*If you have leftover chicken consider making your own broth by putting the chicken carcass into boiling water. After about 10 minutes remove the bones, and once it is cool enough to handle, pick the meat off the bones and put back into the water. You may want to use chicken bouillon cubes to enhance the flavor. This would be a great way for kids to see how to use up everything as leftovers.

*Another option would be to make the biscuit mixture with 1 cup milk to make drop biscuits, place the chicken stew into a large casserole dish, drop the biscuit dough on the top of the hot mixture and bake about 15-20 minutes until biscuits are golden brown. Serve with condiments of your choice: cranberry sauce, pickles, fresh carrots and enjoy. Be sure to save room for the fruit cobbler.