



WINTER | Critters Who Lives Here? Dens and Nests

Summary:

We know lots of animals head south in the winter because of the cold weather. As fall begins, we can watch flocks of birds on their annual migratory trek south but what about the animals that stick around? Today, we'll take a peek at the animals that settle in and snuggle up for the winter.

Before Visiting the Garden:

Gather: Materials to create your own den! Suggestions include chairs, blankets, clothespins, pillows, anything you want to store in your den

Explore: The sculpture *Grapes* by Ai Weiwei: Does this sculpture remind you of a nest?

Read: *Over and Under the Snow* by Kate Messner and illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal

In the Garden:

Animals that do not head south in the winter have a different tactic for survival—hibernation! Squirrels make dens in the hollow parts of trees and cushion them with grass, twigs, and leaves. They keep warm in these sturdy nests. They grow a thick winter coat (if you have a dog, you might notice its coat thickens in winter!) and hide pinecones and nuts during the fall for winter snacking. Similarly, chipmunks make their burrows under trees. They collect food during late summer and spend the winter in their warm nests snacking on stored food or sleeping. Raccoons, skunks, and badgers also spend parts of the winter hibernating

Questions to Explore:

- Do you see any nests here in the garden? Look up and near the ground.
- Can you gather materials in the garden for nest/den building? Hint: leaves or sticks
- Would you rather live up in a tree nest or down near the ground in a cave or tree root? Why?
- If you were building a nest, what would you use

Activity:

1. Start in the garden with the materials you collected. Can you create a den/nest?
2. When you get home, use the materials you gathered to create a more elaborate, people-friendly den.
3. Push chairs together and put a blanket over the top to create a cave or lay a blanket over a bunch of pillows to create a nest.
4. Once you have a spot to snuggle, grab your favorite book and settle in for a winter nap!

Beyond the Garden | Keep Looking!

On a cold, wintery day take the opportunity to bundle up, get out of the house, and explore the neighborhood. See if you can spot any additional animal homes using the web link below as a reference. Do you see a squirrel's nest or a chipmunk's burrow? What materials were used to make them? Are they easy or difficult to spot? Next, compare the materials in the animal dens/nests to the building materials in the homes around you. Do you see any similarities?

Continue Exploring | Supporting Materials

Additional animal homes: http://www.biokids.umich.edu/guides/tracks_and_sign/build/mammalnests/