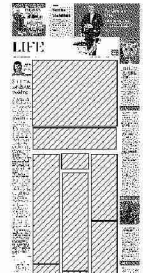


reasons why I love winter

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Snowmen, hot chocolate, warm slippers, a raging fire in the fireplace – these are just a few of the many wonders of winter. Oklahoma’s winters are perfect – we get just enough snow to call off school for a couple of days but not so much to trap us inside our homes for weeks on end. Winter is the season for family holidays, new beginnings and making lifelong memories. My most vivid memories from childhood are of snowball fights, crispy cold weather and scary drives on slippery snow. Winter is my favorite season; here are just a few reasons why.



1. Holiday entertainment. Winter is a great season for holiday entertainment options. From wild acrobatics to glamorous high kicks, rock operas to rock museums, there are more live entertainment options for Oklahomans this year than ever before. See Page 3C for a list of some of the productions coming to our state this winter.

2. Decorating for the holidays. Some Oklahomans such as Marvin and Betty Johnson, 14574 Billy Drive in Edmond, really know how to spread the holiday cheer by adorning their homes and yards with colorful lights, lifelike Santas, snowmen, reindeer and all the other symbols of holiday cheer. The Johnsons' display is something to go out of your way to see. But controlling your holiday lights can be tricky, especially when it's cold, rainy or snowy outside. Remote-controlled indoor/outdoor power outlets with timers can help. They allow you to turn your outdoor lights on and off without stepping outside. The included remote control transmits a signal up to 40 feet so it can be used anywhere in your home. For more information, go online to cableorganizer.com/best-link/remote-controlled-outlet.htm.

3. Sledding. When the snow comes, out come the sleds, sliding down hills on plastic saucers, wooden sleds and even on cardboard boxes and in recycling containers. There is no better or less-expensive way to spend a snow day. But if you don't have a sled already, buy one now; don't wait until that first snow day. While sledding usually is safe and fun, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons warns that an ounce of precaution is worth a pound of cure. See Page 3C for some rules to sled by.

4. Hot chocolate. There is nothing more delicious and warming on a cold winter's day than a big mug of hot chocolate. But did you know there's a difference between hot chocolate

and hot cocoa? According to Mahalo.com, hot cocoa is a beverage derived from cocoa powder, while hot chocolate is made from chocolate bars melted into cream. Either way, the result is nothing less than heavenly. While hot chocolate is a traditional wintertime favorite, hot latte, apple cider and chai tea also will warm your insides on a cold day. And for an unusually decadent hot drink, see Page 3C for a recipe for Frothy Turkish Delight.

5. Warm, cozy pajamas. What could be better on a freezing cold night than curling up by the fireplace in your comfy pajamas with someone you love, sipping on a Frothy Turkish Delight? Whether you're a footed flannel pajamas person or you prefer the satin Hugh Hefner-style look, you'll find great jammies at Target, Old Navy and Walmart. Onlypajamas.com is another great source with styles starting around \$11.

6. Snow days! Every winter, schoolchildren pray for snow days to close schools. Snow days are made for snowball fights, snow angels, sledding and building snowmen. According to "The Old Farmers Almanac 2009," this winter could be one to two degrees cooler on average than last winter, with the coldest periods in the first half of December, early and late January, and mid-February. The almanac predicts that the best chances for snow days will be in mid-December, early to mid-January, and mid- and late February.

7. Ice skating at Devon Ice Rink and snow tubing at AT&T Bricktown Ballpark. The grand lawn of the Civic Center Music Hall, 201 N Walker, will transform from noon to 10 p.m. daily from Friday through Jan. 4 into an outdoor ice-skating rink. Cost to skate is \$8, which includes skate rental and a two-hour session. Skating is \$5 for those who supply their own skates

And if you can't make it to the mountains for snow tubing, head to

Bricktown for the Chesapeake Snow Tubing at the Brick. Each year, children and adults alike take a thrill-ride down the nation's largest manmade snow-tubing slopes. The slopes open Friday. Admission is \$10 for each 90-minute session. Visit downtownindcember.com for special holiday hours of operation.

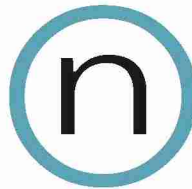
8. Festivals of lights. All across Oklahoma, holiday lights glow throughout December. You can drive through just about any neighborhood to see holiday lights, but if you want to see millions of twinkling lights, you should visit one of the spectacular displays. See Page 3C for a list of a few of the best and brightest Oklahoma has to offer.

9. Winter gardening. Suzy Bales loves winter gardening so much she wrote a book about it. In "The Garden in Winter," Bales recommends winter blooms — snowdrops, hellebores, witch hazel — and evergreens for a colorful tapestry amid a snowy backdrop. She mixes plants, shrubs, vines, holly and hedges with garden structures such as trellises, obelisks and copper arches.

For your vegetable garden, winter is the time for growing hearty kale, collards, brussels sprouts, spinach, leeks, lettuce, parsnips and even gar-

lic.

10. New Year's Eve. It's a holiday celebrated around the world. Oklahoma City sends out the old and rings in the new with "Opening Night," the biggest party of the year. This year's event will feature entertainment from more than 25 performers including Oklahoma's best and brightest stars such as Edgar Cruz (guitar), Son del Barrio (salsa), Boru's Ghost (Celtic), Everybody and Their Dog (improv) and Lemma (rock). The Children's Area returns to the Cox Convention Center and will offer face painting, an inflatable obstacle course, family-friendly performances and hands-on craft activities. As the magical hour approaches, the traditional Opening Night Ball will rise to a backdrop of music and fireworks. Wristbands are \$8 in advance or \$10 at the event, with children younger than 5 admitted free. For more information, go online to ArtsCouncilokc.com.



Winter tips

Go online to <http://knowit.newsok.com/wintersurvival> for winter survival tips