

December 2020

WILD KIDS

SEASONAL NATURE EDUCATION FOR KIDS & THEIR GROWN UPS

A child is shown from the back, standing in a snowy field. They are wearing a tan jacket with a thick orange fur collar, blue knit pants, and blue boots. Their hands are raised in the air, wearing red and blue mittens. The child is surrounded by a flurry of snow, which is also falling in the background. The scene is bright and wintry.

Mysterious
Mistletoe

What Good Are
Thistles?

Making the Most
of Every Season

Wreck This Magazine
(With Nature!)

Seasonal Poems,
Activities,
Nature Journal Pages
and More!

From the editor

BY ALICIA BAYER

What a year it's been, huh? December is the last month of the year and the start of a new season -- winter for those of us in the Northern hemisphere and summer for folks in the Southern hemisphere. This fall was a hard one for us and we had some deaths in our family. I think we all hope that the next season is a better one for everybody.

What is the weather like where you live right now? Here in Minnesota we usually have lots of snow on the ground but this year our lawns are still green. We had a couple of snowstorms in the fall but then the snow all melted. Our younger kids are hoping snow comes soon so they can go sledding, make snow forts and have snowball fights. Our daughter Rhia likes it this way though because she can do more hiking while the weather is still mild and our other kids miss the warm weather. I kind of like the snow because it's so pretty, and shoveling it is good exercise! I'm sure we'll get some eventually and I can be patient. This year has been all about being patient and making the best of things, hasn't it?

Nature helps me with patience. If you look at nature, you see that everything eventually changes. We go through seasons where there is more darkness and then seasons where everything seems new again. If you look closely you can find beauty in every season. In this month's Wild Kids, we have some ideas on how to make the most of every season, plus lots of other nature fun..

I hope you have a safe, happy December.
Have a wonderful, wild month!

~Alicia



Why is Wild Kids free?

Kids (and their grown ups) need nature, and nature needs us! Our family believes in the importance of sharing & helping each other, and of passing on skills to help our world and each other. As long as we are able, we plan to produce Wild Kids to help do this for families who find it useful.

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Contact: alicia.bayer@gmail.com

Find lots more links, information and fun to accompany this month's themes at
www.magicalchildhood.com/wildkids.

Go Wild in December

10 Ways to Learn and Play in Nature this Month

Make ornaments from natural items like sticks, pine cones, shells or seed pods

Take a photo of the sky every day this month

Gather some evergreen boughs to decorate your table

Have a campfire outside (be sure to follow safety rules!)

Gather sticks to whittle or craft with

Spread peanut butter on pine cones and roll in birdseed to hang on trees for the birds

Go on a night walk with lanterns or flashlights

Find a rocky area (even in a parking lot) and look for fossils & cool rocks

Celebrate the solstice on December 21 with a special dinner or celebration

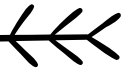
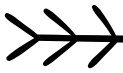
Use our temperature calendar to compare each day's temps to your area's record highs & lows



Making the Most of



EVERY SEASON

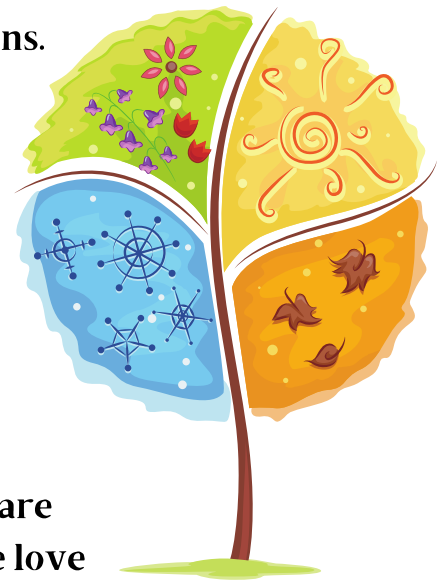


Everybody has seasons they like more than other seasons.

Some people have a hard time in winter because they miss the sunlight or warm weather, and the shorter days make them feel sad.

Some people have a hard time in summer when it's too hot in the daytime to play outside where they live.

Fall makes some people feel sad because garden plants are dying and the trees lose their leaves, while other people love fall because of the beautiful colors and the cooler weather.



Some people live where there are extreme seasons and some people live where the weather stays mostly the same all year, but no matter what, the seasons affect us. No matter where you live, the days are shorter in winter, with fewer hours of sunlight. Baby animals tend to be born in the springtime. Even the stars change with the seasons, appearing in different parts of the sky depending on what time of year it is.

There are lots of ways that nature changes throughout the year, and each season has its own blessings. It can help us make the most of every season if we think about what blessings each one gives us, in nature and in other parts of life. Here are some ways to enjoy each season, and then a page for you to make up your own lists.

Making the Most of **WINTER**



THEMES: REST, HEALING, REFLECTING

Winter is the season of slowing down. We have fewer hours of sunlight and cooler weather, making it a great time for cozying up indoors. Even though some plants and trees seem dead in winter, many of them are actually dormant, resting until spring. Many animals are hibernating. We people need periods of deeper rest and healing sometimes too.

Winter is also a time for reflection, or thinking and remembering. Gardeners use winter to think about what plants failed and thrived in their gardens in order to plan for next year. Some people make resolutions for things they want to change in the next year. Some people look back at the ending year and remember the best parts and what they're proud of or want to change.

WAYS TO ENJOY NATURE

Nature hikes, ice skating, playing in the snow, taking nature photos, feeding the birds, looking for tracks, making safe campfires, planning gardens, reading nature books, looking through seed catalogs, sledding, skiing, snowshoeing, having snowball fights, making ice lanterns, forcing bulbs, nature journaling, researching nature topics like wild plants to forage, making snow forts, going on family walks, making snowmen...

WHAT TO FORAGE

Nuts like acorns, dried rosehips and hawthorn berries for teas and medicines, pine and spruce needles for tea, nature items like pine cones for crafting, barks for remedies (be sure to do this in ways that protect the tree), roots of plants like burdock if the ground is not frozen, greens like chickweed (which can even be found under the snow)

Making the Most of

SPRING

THEMES: GROWTH, BEGINNINGS

Spring is the season of rebirth and new beginnings. The days are getting longer and warmer. Migrating birds and butterflies return to Northern areas. Baby birds and animals are born. There are often lots of rains that make everything seem green and bright again, and bring lots of flowers. Lots of people choose to start new projects and we tend to want to get outside and get busy after our long rest of winter.

WAYS TO ENJOY NATURE

Planting gardens, putting out wool and short bits of yarn for nesting birds, flying kites, foraging wild greens, biking, visiting parks, starting seeds indoors, nature hikes, feeding the birds, going on family walks, planting trees and bushes, walking in the rain, stomping in puddles, watching storms, planting trees and bushes, making mudpies, collecting rocks or shells, making wreaths and crowns from last year's vines, bird watching, skipping stones...

WHAT TO FORAGE

Greens like nettles and garlic mustard, flowers like dandelion blossoms and violets, mushrooms like morels and pheasant backs, young cattail shoots, spruce tips, ramps, wild asparagus and other green shoots

Making the Most of

SUMMER

THEMES: ABUNDANCE, ENERGY

Summer is a lively time of long days and hot weather. It's a time when nature is full of abundance. There are all kinds of wild foods for people and animals to forage like berries, fruits and greens. We tend to have lots of energy and often have more time to play. Even baby animals play in the summer, which helps them learn what they'll need to know later in life. Play helps us in all kinds of ways too, and summer gives us lots of ways to play.

WAYS TO ENJOY NATURE

Bike riding, swimming, boating, hiking, camping, rock climbing, exploring caves, gardening, going to the beach, paddle boarding, surfing, having picnics, going to parks, playing frisbee and ball, climbing trees, lying in a hammock, pressing flowers, chasing fireflies (don't harm them!), watching clouds, playing in the mud, blowing bubbles, looking for shooting stars, beach combing, wading in springs, building shelters, make sand castles, berry picking, playing in the sprinkler, raising butterflies, making sidewalk chalk pictures, starting bug collections, stargazing...

WHAT TO FORAGE

Berries like black raspberries and gooseberries, fruits like wild plums and crab apples, mushrooms like chicken of the woods, plant parts like raspberry leaves and elderflowers for medicinal teas, pokeberries for beautiful ink (do not eat them!), summer greens like lambsquarters and purslane

Making the Most of

AUTUMN

THEMES: HARVEST, CELEBRATIONS

Autumn is traditionally the harvest time for people around the world, when farm and garden crops are ready. People and animals gather and store foods for the winter.

Many families have feasts to give thanks for the blessings of the year. Even in busy cities, there are often lots of foods to gather in parks and neighborhoods like apples, walnuts and rose hips. For many kids, school, sports and clubs start up again in the fall. The cooler weather in fall lets us enjoy time outside in new ways.

WAYS TO ENJOY NATURE

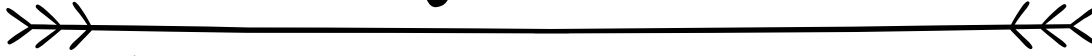
Collecting colorful leaves, going on nature hikes, biking, making mushroom spore prints, playing with milkweed and cattail fluff, scattering wildflower seeds, planting spring bulbs, stargazing, collecting acorns, building safe campfires, jumping in leaf piles, doing leaf rubbings, going apple picking, visiting pumpkin patches and corn mazes, going on family walks, learning skills like whittling, bringing summer plants like geraniums and begonias inside as houseplants for the winter (they'll keep on blooming and bring a little nature inside), having cookouts in your backyard or the park, carving pumpkins...

WHAT TO FORAGE

Wild mushrooms like oyster mushrooms and chicken of the woods (fall is the best time of year for wild mushroom hunting), nuts like acorns and walnuts, late berries like hawthorn berries, late fruits like apples and pears, seeds like dock seeds and nettle seeds, nature items like cattails and pine cones for crafts

What I'm Looking Forward to in

Every Season



(Include birthdays, special events and all your favorite activities!)



Winter

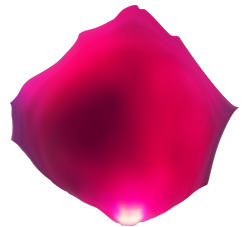
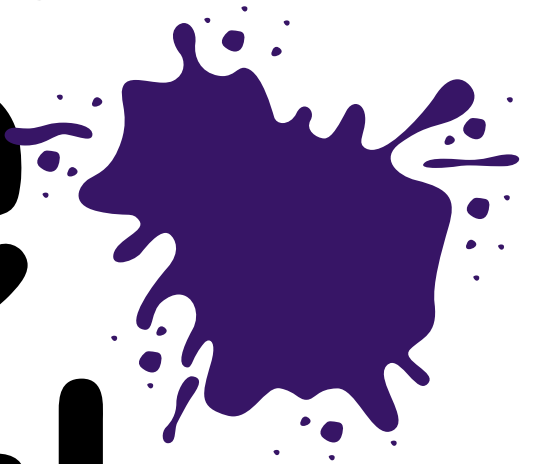
Spring

Summer

Autumn

Use nature to

Wreck these Pages!



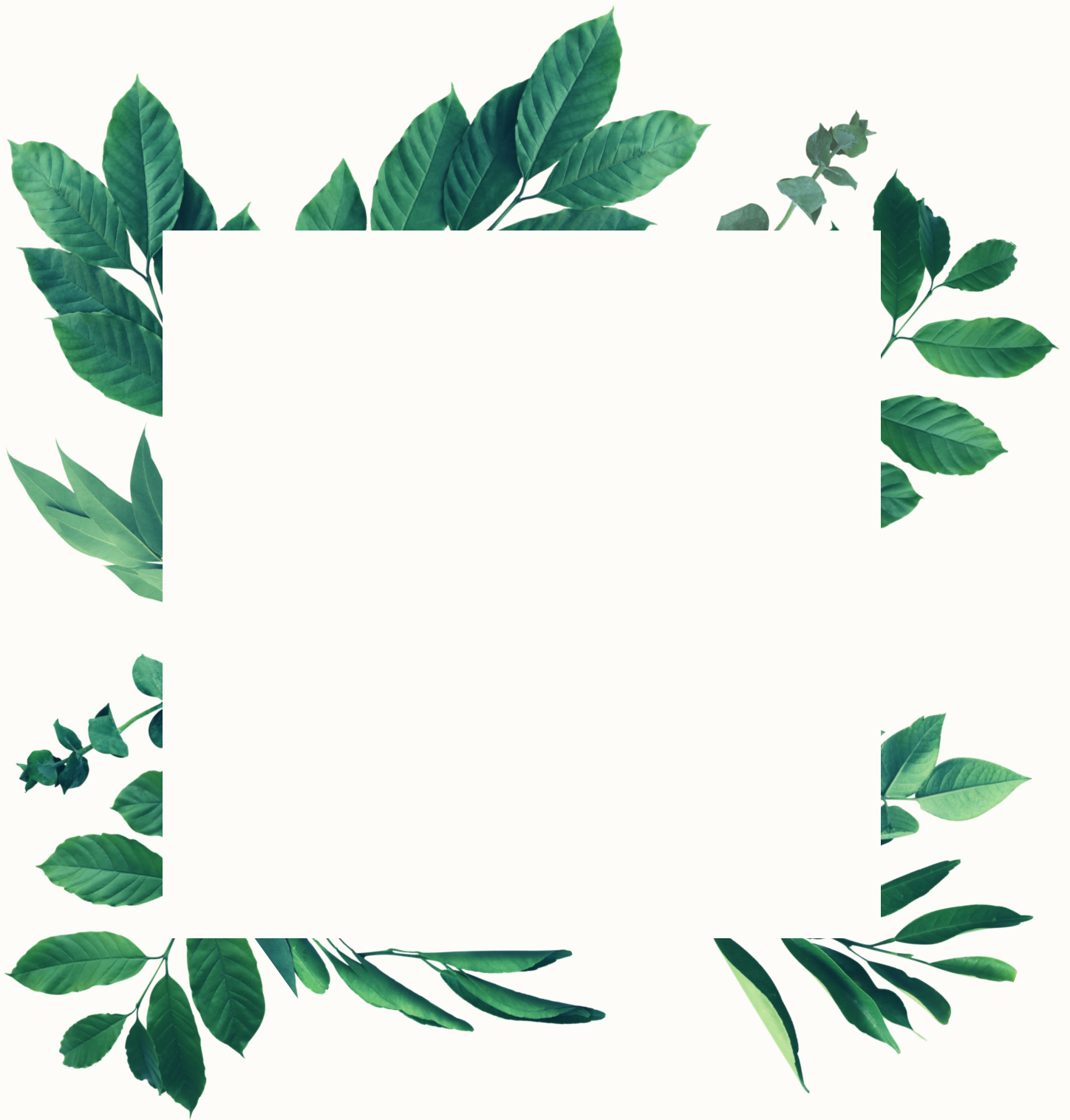
Let's have some art fun with nature! Take the following pages outside and make a marvelous mess with the things you find.

Find (or make) some mud outside and press your hand in it.
Press your handprint on this page.





Now use your muddy fingerprints to make a design all over.



Find some small leaves you like and arrange them in the square above, then cover them with clear contact paper or packing tape to keep them in place and preserve them.

Use markers (not waterproof!) to color a design all over this page and then leave it in the rain or snow. Bring it inside and let it dry.



Dribble muddy water on this page in a design.

Find as many different kinds of leaves as you can and put them under this page.
Rub the side of a crayon all over the paper above each one to make rubbings.



Put leaves, flowers and other plant parts on this page and cover it with a piece of paper. Pound it with a mallet or round rock to leave imprints.



Poems for December

The color of springtime is in the flowers; the color of winter is in the imagination.

- Terri Guillemets

Ring Out, Wild Bells
by Alfred Lord Tennyson,

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more,
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

**Lighting one candle
from another -
Winter night**

- Buson

The Snowflake Tree
by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

The hawthorn is dead, the rose-leaves have fled
On the north wind over the sea:
Now the petals will fall that are rarest of all,
Sweetheart, from the Snowflake Tree.

The Tree, it doth stand in that marvelous land
Whose shore like a sapphire gleams,
Where a crown hangs high in the northern sky,
Forth raying its golden beams.

It tosses its boughs with their crystalline blows;
They crackle and tinkle for glee
When the north wind shrieks round the awful peaks,
On the shores of the polar sea.

And never a bird its blossoms has stirred,
Or built on its branches a nest;
For the perfume which floats from the blossoms' throats
Would freeze the song in its breast.

And my own little bird, were her goldilocks stirred
By the wind thro' its branches which blows,
With her songs silenced all, forever would fall
Asleep on the silver snows.

But our hearth burns bright, little sweetheart, to-night,
And we're far from the Snowflake Tree;
Thou canst nestle in bed thy little gold head,
And thy songs shall awaken with thee.

What Good Are Thistles?

You've probably seen lots of thistles in your life -- those prickly weeds that grow in yards, parks and abandoned lots. They can grow just about anywhere and are a great annoyance to gardeners and homeowners.



Thistles are like just about every other weed in that they do have ways they help the world though. Here are a few of the ways thistles help us.

They help birds. Birds like goldfinches love thistle seeds, and some people buy them for their bird feeders.



They have medicinal benefits. Thistles have traditionally been used for joint pain and one study found that drinking a thistle tea several times a day helped children who were unable to stand due to joint pain to regain function. Many people buy milk thistle seeds as supplements to support their livers and milk thistle was traditionally used for many other ailments. There have been studies lately about using milk thistle to increase breastfeeding mothers' milk supplies, help treat Alzheimer's Disease and prostate cancer, help kidney function and immune function, and more.

They're edible. All species of thistles are edible, though some species taste better than others and they taste different at different stages of growth. Some people peel the stalks and eat those (they taste a bit like celery or cucumber), while others eat the roots, unopened blossoms (just like artichokes, which are also thistles), or trimmed leaves. You have to wear thick gloves to handle them though, since they are very spiky! All that said, thistles are not the best tasting wild plants and are so much trouble that only the most dedicated foragers tend to gather them.



They have useful parts. Older stems can be used for cordage (rope making) and the seed heads can be used as fire starters. The leaf ribs also contain lots of liquid that can be used as a clean water source.

They help pollinators. Many species of butterflies rely on thistles, like the American Painted Lady butterfly, Black Swallowtail, Delaware skipper, Palamedes Swallowtail, Palmetto Skipper, Three-Spotted Skipper, Twin-Spot skipper and more. Bees also love thistle flowers.



"LADIES THISTLE"

(*Cirsium species*)

Plate 79.



From: *A Curious Herbal: Containing Five Hundred Cuts Of The Most Useful Plants Which Are Now Used In The Practice Of Physick,*
Written, illustrated and engraved by Elizabeth Blackwell, 1737



Mysterious Mistletoe

Most people know two things about mistletoe -- It's a tradition at Christmas time to kiss under it, and the berries are poisonous. But there's a lot more to learn about this interesting plant!

- 1. It is a plant parasite.** Mistletoe attaches itself to trees, plants and shrubs, stealing their nutrients and water. This weakens the host plant and can eventually kill it. Technically, mistletoe is a hemi-parasite because it gets some of its energy through photosynthesis and the rest from other plants.
- 2. Its ability to stay green all winter made it seem magical.** In ancient times, people thought the plant must have supernatural powers to stay green all year, which led to good luck rituals like kissing under it. We now know it really stays green because it is stealing those nutrients and water from the host tree.
- 3. All parts of it are poisonous.** Eating any part of the plant can cause drowsiness, blurred vision, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, weakness and seizures. The toxins are especially potent in the leaves, but the berries are also poisonous.
- 4. It also has medicinal properties.** Sometimes plants can be poisonous in one form or in larger doses but can also be used to make medicine. Some mistletoe varieties have been used for hundreds of years to treat seizures, headaches, infertility, high blood pressure and arthritis. In the U.S. there are clinical trials using mistletoe as a treatment for cancer, and it is already available by prescription for cancer patients in parts of Europe.
- 5. It grows in all different regions.** While European mistletoe grows in temperate regions, some species grow in American deserts and live on desert plants like mesquite, pines and junipers.
- 6. It doesn't all look the same.** The leaves and berries are different in different species. Sometimes the leaves are yellow or orange, and some varieties have no leaves at all.
- 7. Its name means "poop on a stick."** Anglo-Saxon people noticed that mistletoe often grows where birds leave droppings, and named it "mistel" for "dung" and "tan" for "twig."
- 8. It grows into clumps that people used to call witches' brooms.** They can reach 5 feet wide and weigh up to 50 pounds!
- 9. Even though it hurts trees, it helps birds.** Scientists in different parts of the world have noticed that when mistletoe is removed from trees, the populations of birds decline. Birds rely on the berries for food and birds like owls, mourning doves, chickadees and hawks nest in the dense clumps (squirrels too!). Mistletoe-infested trees can lead to three times as many of these kinds of birds in a forest. When trees die from mistletoe, the dead trees also become homes for raptors.
- 10. It provides food for animals, butterflies and bees.** Even though it is poisonous for people, the berries provide food in the fall and winter for animals like deer, elk, porcupines, chipmunks and others. Several butterflies depend on mistletoe for survival, too. They lay eggs on mistletoe and the caterpillars hatch and eat the leaves. The adult butterflies feed on mistletoe nectar, and some bees do, too.



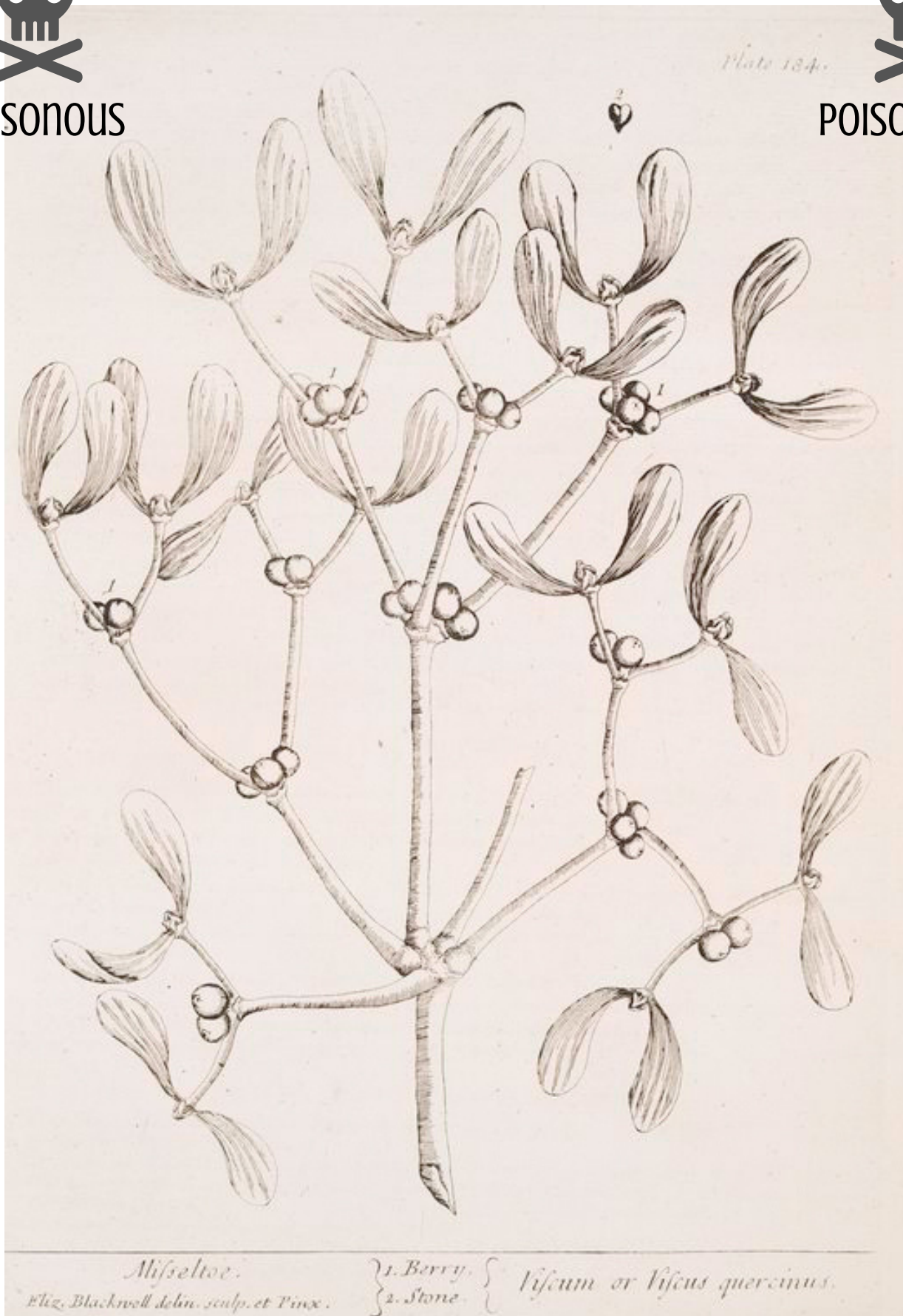


POISONOUS

MISTLETOE

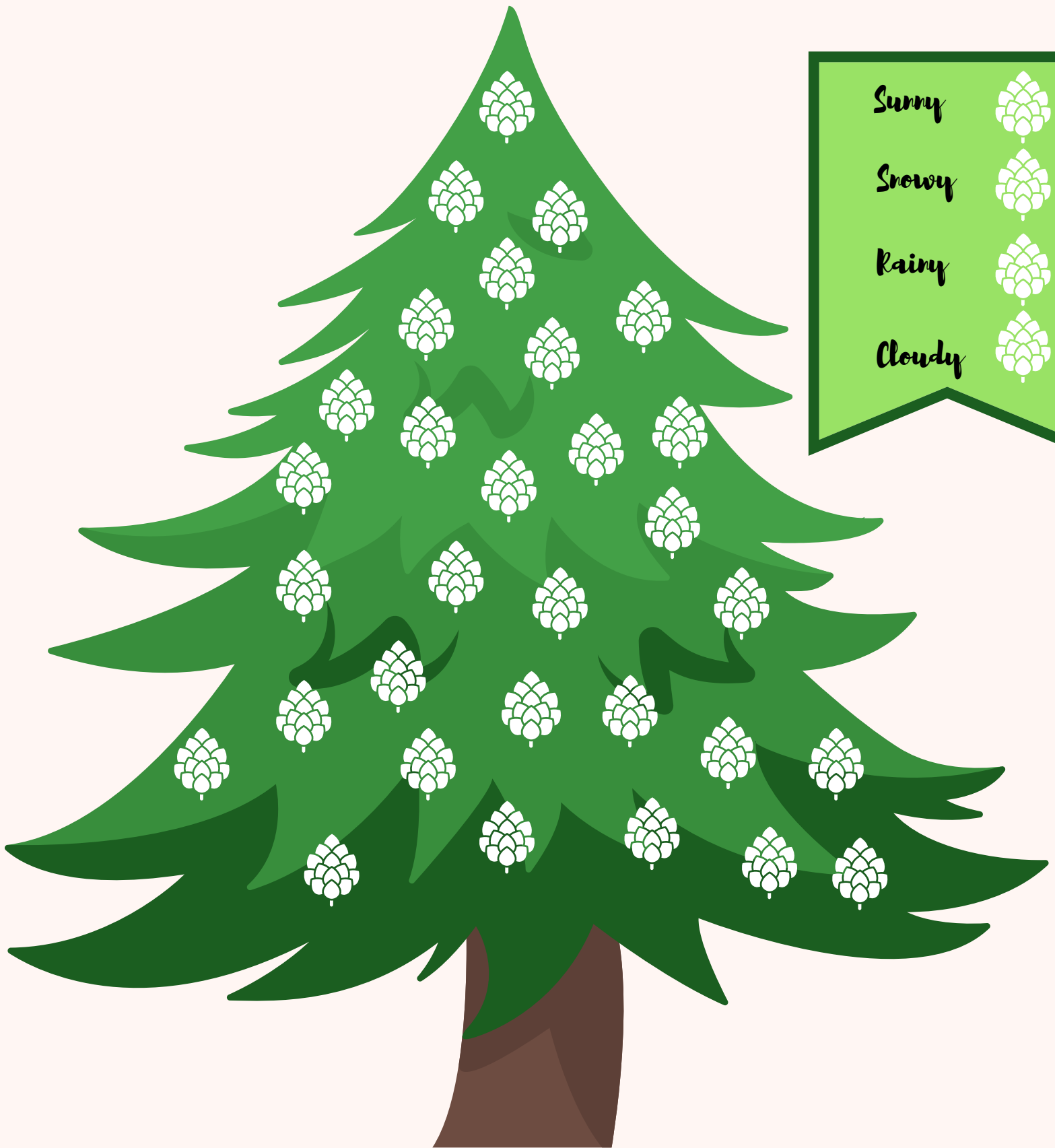


POISONOUS



From: *A Curious Herbal: Containing Five Hundred Cuts Of The Most Useful Plants Which Are Now Used In The Practice Of Physick,*
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December Weather Tree



December



December Bird List

Birds spotted this month

December Animal List

Mammals, reptiles & other wildlife spotted this month

December Nature Notes

Record any interesting discoveries here -- plants you identify, foods you forage, outdoor activities, cool nature projects, nature books read, or just notes about what it's like outside this week!

Week 1 Observations

Week 2 Observations

Week 3 Observations

Week 4 Observations



Want to see your stuff in Wild Kids?

We welcome articles, photos, artwork and other submissions from kids and their grown ups.

Visit magicalchildhood.com/wildkids to learn more.