

Let all be MERRY AND BRIGHT

It might be dark, wet and cold but here are some sure-fire ideas for adding sparkle at your setting this winter, inside and out. Tips are courtesy of NDNA members and our own early years experts.

Do you have your festive fun mapped out? Have you thought about all the winter festivals that you could celebrate?

This time of year is an absolute gift for nurseries with so many exciting sights, smells, sounds and things to do. Is there room for some new tricks within your tried and tested repertoire?

Now's the time to turn your attention to what children might want to do and when – as well as what you'll need to make it happen.

Fiona Bland, NDNA Early Years Adviser, says: "As always, nurseries should find out what the children want to do and enable them to follow their interests. Let them lead the way, whether their desire is to draw and paint, sing or dance, build,

climb, explore or re-tell favourite stories.

"Preparing for activities is essential, whether this is bringing in ground ginger to make the playdough smell like gingerbread or glitter and tinsel to add to water or sand play.

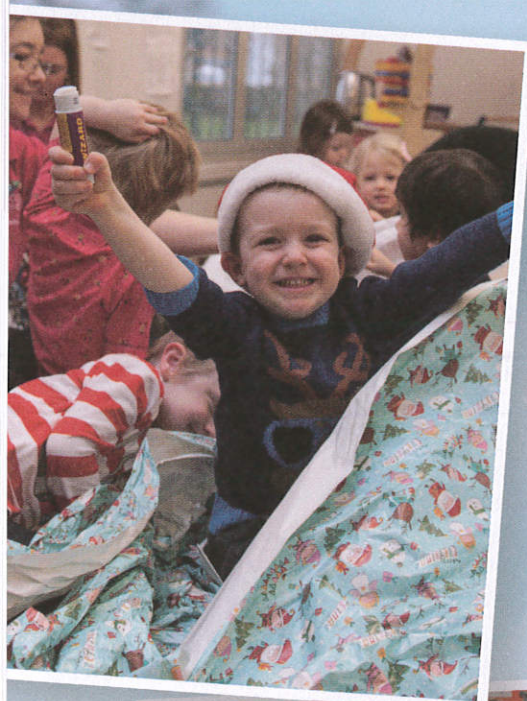
"Such winter activities can be linked to all areas of learning. Think about how you can incorporate children's interests and fascinations and make the most out of each learning experience, reviewing it and building upon the learning."

There's not only Christmas to inspire but also the Jewish festival of Hanukkah – from 24 December to 1 January this time - and the Hindu festival of Diwali, happening right now, from 30 October to 3 November.

Fiona says: "The eight-day-long Hanukkah is a festival of lights with a focus on candles so there is plenty of scope for activity there. Diwali typically features fireworks and family treats.

"Looking ahead, Chinese New Year from late January to mid-February is also a fabulous source of activities that many nurseries already do really well, with dragons and beautiful red good luck banners.

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Children having fun with packaging at Holyrood Hope Nursery, Salford

"This all fits in with the Government's British Values guidelines for nurseries on celebrating different faiths and cultures."

Fiona continues: "Valentine's Day too, on February 14, is a great time to explore themed sensory experiences from heart-shaped balloons to petals, ribbons, feathers and play with rose-scented rice."

Deck the halls: Clear space and give the children boxes of decorations. Let them decide what should go where and how the room should look. Use the same principle for trimming the tree.

Build an igloo: Meithrinfa Y Pelican Nursery in Cardiff collects plastic milk cartons all year for the children to assemble to make an amazing den! Check Pinterest and YouTube for practical guides ... but start gathering cartons now, and enlist the help of your community - you will need hundreds for some of these ice palaces! Cool Milk, which supplies organic milk to many NDNA member nurseries, also has lots of ideas for fun things to do with milk cartons.

Devise your own winter Olympics: Some themed games will go a long way to injecting some extra-festive sparkle into outdoor play.

Create some festive treasure baskets: Babies will love to explore the textures, smells and sounds of Christmas. Good things to add could include tinsel, bells, a snow globe, pine cones and bags of spices.

Make ice sculptures: Using various containers, rubber gloves or balloons filled with natural materials, maybe food colouring and anything else suitable. Use the freezer if the weather isn't



cold enough – and make sure you have trays for the sculptures to stand in. Building tools can also be used under close supervision to chip away at ice blocks.

Bake some aromatic treats: Nutmeg, ginger and cinnamon are some of the flavours associated with this time of year. Fill the air with beautiful baking smells as well as creating some tasty treats.

Spice up your play dough. Add citrus oils, spices, glitter and festive colourings to your usual recipe to enhance the sensory experience, while being mindful of choking hazards and allergies. Children can crush their own spices in a pestle and mortar and grate their own nutmeg as part of the process.

Save that packaging: All those cardboard boxes and brightly-coloured festive wrappings are great for open-ended play and junk modelling. Don't banish them to the recycling.

Invite Santa round: An obvious one, but Big Bird Nursery in South Lanarkshire for one example really does this in style, with real reindeers. Families, too, are invited for hot chocolate and marshmallows, and to spend a few pounds at festive craft stalls.

Throw a party: Everyone loves to put their best party shirts on and have a dance and toddlers and pre-schoolers are no exception. Go mad with the decorations and get the music pumping, ideally with some exciting lighting ... or how about an outdoor disco?

Keep it green: A great idea from Meithrinfa Y Pelican Nursery is to give each family a tree to take home and plant, as well as giving gifts to children.

Share the love: All winter festivals share a community sentiment and it's a pertinent time of year to help others. Kiddi Caru nurseries raise money for Home-Start UK's Snowflake Appeal with snowflake-themed activities such as baking snowflake biscuits, fancy dress parties and adorning rooms with the children's snowflake decorations.

MEMBERS' RESOURCES

NDNA's Your Essential Guide to Fun For All Seasons publication, available at www.ndna.org.uk/shop features almost 100 pages of seasonal activity ideas including songs and recipes, all collated, devised and tested by our early years experts.