



A Youth Gardening project
sponsored by The Gardeners of America

Winter
Activities

Meet My Terrific Tree!

Welcome to a special project designed for youths of all ages: Meet My Terrific Tree! You can start at any time of the year to observe your tree during every season, giving you 365 days to enjoy and appreciate your tree. Prepare yourself for exciting projects, experiments, activities, opportunities, and much, much more! Some activities you will want to do yourself; sometimes you will want others to share in your fun.

Things you should know before getting started:

1. **Find your tree.** It should be close enough for you to visit often.
2. **You'll report your details and discoveries online.** At the end of every season, send all your work to the National Youth Gardening Chair, Cheri Kessen, at ckessen2001@yahoo.com
3. **Find your pace.** You don't have to do everything on the list each season, but try hard to do all you can. Put a check mark beside the ones you completed.
4. **Plan ahead.** Before going to visit your tree, make sure you have what you will need to take with you to complete your assignment.
5. **Show us!** Send us your drawings, poems and stories that you write.
6. **Make memories!** Maybe keep a Tree scrapbook of photos or diary to record your visits and what you saw.
7. **Be yourself!** Add anything you want, or try something different anytime during the correct season.
8. **Official Stuff.** The Gardeners of America needs signed permission from your parent or guardian to place pictures and names in promotional materials.

Parent/Guardian's name (Print) _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Circle: Parent or Guardian

We're excited to Meet Your Terrific Tree and hope you soon will be very excited, too. Let's get going!

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My name is _____ Age _____

I named my tree _____

Where is it growing? _____

What kind of tree is it? _____

Tell us more about your tree.

Why did you pick this tree?

What do you like best about your terrific tree?

This project observes meteorological seasons. Meteorological winter falls during the coldest three months – December, January and February in the United States.

Meteorological Winter

December 1 – February 28

A. Habitat Observations

Take a nature walk to examine the winter habitat surrounding your Terrific Tree.

1. What has **changed** and/or what is happening now ...

In December?

In January?

In February?



2. Are squirrel, bird or insect nests **visible** now that you may not have seen when your Terrific Tree was covered in leaves? Explain what you see or don't see.

3. Look under your tree to try to find a twig to **save for your winter example** (because the leaves are gone).

4. Visit your Terrific Tree several different times during the winter, walking around it, **listening to sounds**. Describe them.

5. Did the winter weather **damage** your Terrific Tree? Tell us about it.

B. Cinquain

Cinquain (pronounced [sin-kān](#)) is a five-line poem that describes a mood or emotion. It does not need to rhyme.

Each line has a purpose:

Line 1 = 2 syllables, the title

Line 2 = 4 syllables, describing the title

Line 3 = 6 syllables, describing the action

Line 4 = 8 syllables, describing how you feel

Line 5 = 2 syllables, referring to the title

Example 1: Maple
Tall and upright
It's blowing in the wind
Happy, free, stretching, without leaves
My Tree

Example 2: Redwood
Very old, very huge
Fire spreads through the forest
I'm frightened, sad, sorry, somber
Northwest

Now, write your own cinquain for **each winter month**, about your Terrific Tree or any other tree. Here are some hints:

December: A pine tree or other holiday tree

January: Maybe it's snowing or sleeting

February: Are buds forming, or birds returning?

Learn more about writing cinquains: www.poetry4kids.com/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/

C. Just for the Birds

1. **Feeders.** There are many kinds of bird feeders for many kinds of birds.
 - a. **Low platform or tray feeders** for birds that are ground feeders or prefer to eat near the ground. These birds like millet and other seeds, such as sunflower seeds.
 - b. **Elevated feeders** are favored by most birds, filled with larger seeds, such as oil and striped sunflower, safflower and sunflower chips.
 - c. **Tube and finch feeders.**
 - d. **Suet feeders** come in several sizes and flavors. Suet takes the place of insects. If you don't have a holder, just hang your suet cake in a small mesh onion or bulb bag on or close to your Terrific Tree.

Project # 1

Hopefully, you have one or more bird feeders at your home. If not, you can make your own with a gallon plastic milk jug. Wash it out, rinse it well, dry it and put the cap back on (this will keep the bird food dry from rain).

Carefully cut holes in two sides (not the handle side), about 2½ inches from the bottom of the jug.

Add bird seed and hang from the handle with wire or string from or close to your Terrific Tree, where you can see it. Be sure the cut edges are smooth so the birds don't get hurt. You might want to put masking tape around the openings. Any bright color will work because you want the birds to know the food is there.

Just google milk jug bird feeders for all kinds of ideas.



Project # 2

Collect pinecones and pack them with suet, nuts, raisins, peanut butter, cornmeal, bird seed or a combination of these birdy goodies. Stuff as much as you can into the pinecone, then spread the entire pinecone with peanut butter and roll it in bird seed. Hang the pinecone on or close to your Terrific Tree. Have fun watching the bird attack!



In the winter, once you start feeding, it is important that you continue because the birds will come to depend on your food supply. However, do not overfeed; they need to be encouraged to continue looking for food on their own.



2. **Bird Houses**. There are many kinds of bird houses, which are much different than bird feeders.
 - a. You want bright-colored feeders so birds will find them easily, but you want darker houses and **earthy tones** that will blend into the environment, be hidden out of sight so birds will be safe.

- b. **Some birds migrate** and return in the spring looking for a home. Some will return to the same home year after year. Others will seek out a new home.
- c. Large **gourds** make wonderful homes. One variety is the “Birdhouse” or “Dipper” gourd. You can hang several from a pole or the branches of your Terrific Tree.
- d. **Birds like to hang out** in barns, in shrubs and in trees.
- e. Certain breeds of birds only want to live in **certain kinds of houses**.
- f. If you don’t have a bird house, this would be the season to **build one** or decorate one from a craft store.

D. Snow Time

1. **Tracks in the snow.** If you find tracks, don’t get too close to them or you might disturb them.
 - a. Check an animal tracks identification guide to try to figure out who has been visiting your Terrific Tree.
 - b. Get a little plaster of paris and mix it with a little water in a bowl, can or bucket. Carefully go to the track and pour some of the mixture into the track. Leave it until it hardens, then lift it out of the snow (or soft ground). Try again to identify your Terrific Tree’s visitor(s).
 - c. Now tell us what you found out!
2. **It’s snowing – let’s catch some snowflakes!**

Experiment # 1

If you're wearing a dark-colored coat or jacket, you are ready to go out with a magnifying glass. Otherwise, take a dark-colored piece of construction paper with you. Catch some falling flakes and quickly observe them with your magnifying glass. No two snow flakes are the same! How many different sizes and shapes do you see?



Is the snow clean? Let's see ...

Experiment # 2

Take a clean container outside and collect 2-to-4 cups of new snow. Be careful not to get dirt, grass or leaves in your container. Take it inside and let it melt.

Get a second container and place a paper towel over the top (this will be your filter). Gently pour the melted snow through the paper towel into the container. Examine the paper towel to see how much dirt is collected on the paper towel.

How do you think it gets so dirty?

Is it a good idea to catch snowflakes on your tongue?

Should you **eat** snow?

WARNING: Never touch or eat **yellow snow**! Why?

Hopefully, we will have a heavy enough snowfall so you can build a snow person close to your Terrific Tree or at least where your Tree can see it. Send us a picture of you and your snow person. Now name your snow person and add clothing and other details.

Write a report from the snow person's point of view. Then, retell the story as if the snow person were in a snow storm or woke up one morning to find lots of snow on the ground.



Snow acts as blanket for many plants. The top of grass is dead but the roots are alive. Plants stop growing but the roots are alive.

3. **Colored icicles**

You will need some adult help for this project. Take a lidless soup can or a small fruit or vegetable can and put holes near the top on opposite sides of the can. Put a smaller hole in the center of the solid **bottom** of the can. Attach a heavy cord or wire to one side hole and string it across the can top and attach to opposite hole. Give it enough length so it can hang up on a branch of your Terrific Tree, another tree, a fence post, etc.

Fill the can with water and **add a couple drops of food coloring**. Stir and hang the can so the water will slowly drip out, forming a colored icicle.

E. Christmas fun

Project # 1

Decorate your outside Terrific Tree with special Christmas treats for the birds. If you can't reach the limbs, hang decorations close to the tree.

- Use heavy thread, string or floral wire to string up **ropes of treats**: popcorn, fresh cranberries, dried figs and raisins.
- **Birds like fruit**: dried apple rings, fresh thick orange slices, tiny fresh crab apples with stems and/or red flame seedless grapes tied up in bundles.
- **Tie tiny bundles** of dried corn, dried small sunflower heads, nosegays of wheat or other grains and place them around your Terrific Tree.
- **On the ground** under your tree place peanuts (in their shells) and whole walnuts for the squirrels.



Project # 2

Make a torn-paper Santa for your Terrific Tree to look at through your window. No cutting or drawing required: Just tear colored paper into the shape you want:

- Black – solid background, boots and belt
- White – snow pile under Santa's feet, wide fur across his coat bottom, topping his boots and the ends of his sleeves, and for the row of buttons on his coat. Also for his beard, and the rim and tiptop of his hat

- Red – hat, coat and pants (Hint: Tear out the entire body first and then glue on the white, black and pink pieces.)
- Pink – head and mittens
- Use a black marking pen for his eyes, eyebrows, nose, mustache and mouth.



F. Valentine's Day

1. Pretend your Terrific Tree can send you a valentine. What would it say?
2. Now **draw a big heart** and write on it. What you would say to your Terrific Tree?



Winter Summary

1. Winter is ending and it's time to **send in your report, by February 28**. Send it to Cheri Kessen, the National Youth Gardening Chair, at ckessen2001@yahoo.com
2. List 3 things you learned this winter about your Terrific Tree.
3. What did you do to share your Terrific Tree with birds or other critters this winter?
4. I made My Terrific Tree very happy when together we ...