

Muir Woods Winter Solstice Guide



Winter Solstice Musings

Already it feels like winter! Coho in the creek, polypody unfurling, kinglets and varied thrush flitting through the underbrush, mushrooms galore. We're even sniffing the first fetid adder's-tongue! Another Woods tradition will soon mark the season: Winter Solstice!

This year marks another change in the program, prompted like the others, by the event's increasing popularity. In 1981, a memo from Washington D.C. urged us to bring the Christmas spirit into the park. We selected a bay tree (reputed to be Muir's choice for a Christmas tree in his Martinez home) for the Visitor Center. To make each visitor feel welcome and comfortable, we swagged the entrance fencing, invited a storyteller, and 40 of us held candles and quietly walked in the woods.

We introduced luminaria the next year. To honor the cycle of the seasons, we invited the public to make small wreaths while we decorated the fencing. Word was starting to get out and our walk to the storytelling circle now drew

100 people.

Soon artists were creating special pieces for solstice, the Loosely Knits played in the Visitor Center. We sipped solstice cider, and an intern wrote the first shadow puppet play. Morris Dancers emerged as a tradition! Soon, we needed a stage, then a sound system. We made it through ice storms, the government shutdown, trees falling mid-performance, a stunning full moon and salmon splashing in the creek one year.

Popularity and increasing numbers of families encouraged us to add late afternoon activities like solstice crowns. Luminaria went all the way to Cathedral Grove. There was the year we were told "no open flames", then a year without bonfires due to "Spare the Air". We recall memories of haiku, Chief Marin, and Bob Muirly.

This year, a new focus! Look for the "evergreen" features: the VC wreaths to recall the circling seasons, storytelling at the edge of the forest, and luminaria to offer a light to guide you safely as you leave the park. Now, we celebrate the shortest day among the tallest trees! ~ *Ranger Mia*

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Solstice Do-It-Yourself Guide

Create your own solstice celebration at home. This booklet contains ideas to celebrate the joys of winter and the goodwill that comes when people gather to tell stories, sing songs and honor the cycles of nature.

Invite friends to gather near an evergreen in your neighborhood toward the end of the shortest day, December 21. Line the path with luminaria. Prepare a thermos of hot solstice cider and ask everyone to bring a mug, dress warmly, and provide their own lighting for safety! Provide wire rings and greenery to honor the circle of life by making wreaths. You may wish to ask everyone to bring a poem or a song to share, or make a solstice songbook for a rousing round of singing. Someone may even be a good storyteller! Be creative! As an example, we've included instructions on making shadow puppets and creating a solstice play that recaps the year's highlights. Think of it as the traditional holiday letter performance for friends and family.

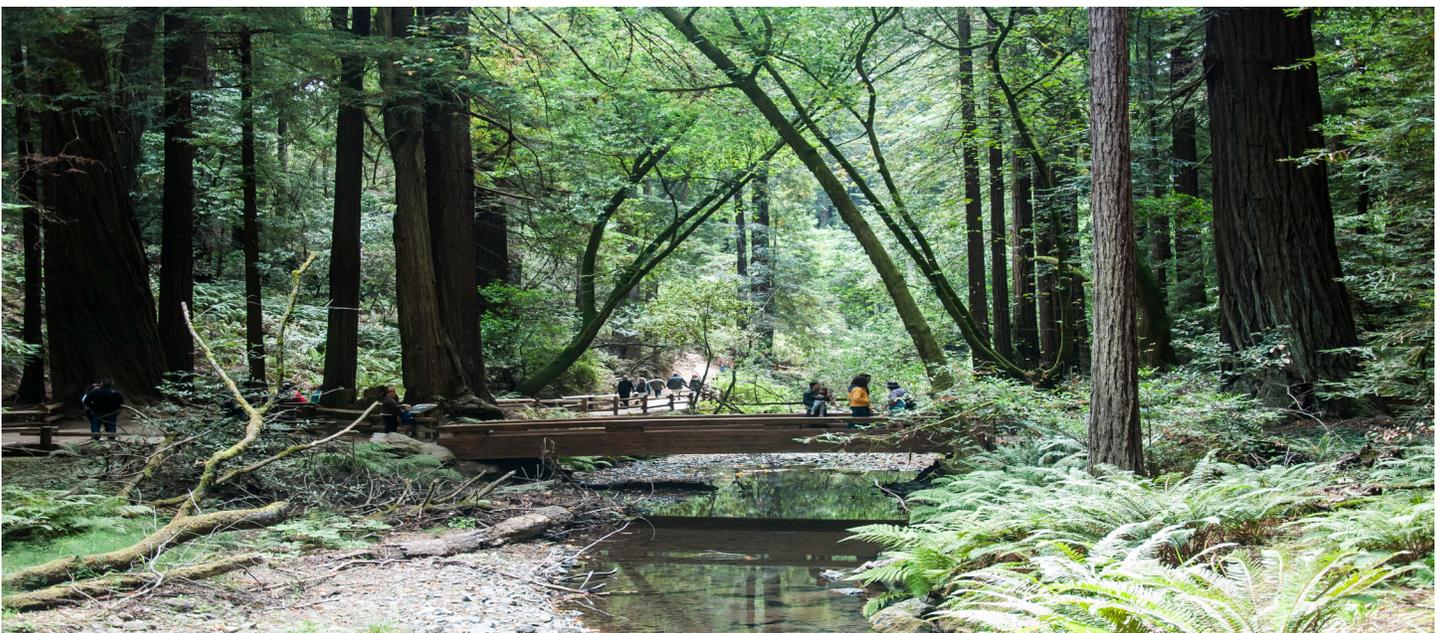
If possible, have a fire in a BBQ or fire ring, but make sure it is not a Spare the Air evening! If an outdoor open fire is not possible, gather symbolically while holding candles or stand around one candle. As the sun sets, draw closer for song and story, a cider toast and the warmth of friendship as the longest night starts.

There are many symbols from traditions around the world, too.

- **Keeping the light of the sun hopefully in our midst through luminaria, candle and fire**
- **Recall the cycle of the seasons through wreaths and the circle around a fire**
- **Evergreens also remind us of life continuing even when it is cold and dark**
- **Sing songs of the season**
- **Eat traditional foods**
- **Be safe and stay warm. Check out our winter safety tips for enjoying this wondrous of all seasons outdoors.**

Solstice Safety

- Keep warm and bundle up
- Don't forget a hat for what's on top
- Provide warm fluids, hardy meals and snacks
- Some extra clothes are good to pack
- Don't go it alone, stay with a group, let others know your schedule and route
- Carry a flashlight, make yourself bright
- wear reflective clothing to stand out at night
- Do not leave candles unattended or fires alight, keep open flames and children well in sight
- Know your environment, when the sun sets, do cell phones have coverage? It's wise to check.



A Word about Resource Protection

We love our national parks and want to keep it just as beautiful and valuable for generations to come. Please do not collect greenery, sticks, sand, rocks, or anything from a national park. Remember, cumulative small actions can lead to big impacts.

Luminaria

Traditional luminaria are made from brown paper bags, weighted down with sand and illuminated from within by a lighted candle. These are typically arranged in rows to create large and elaborate displays.

Step 1: Gather Materials

- a. Paper bag (lunch bag size),
- b. Sand or rocks about a half cup per bag,
- c. Tea light candles or battery-operated small tea light (for those who don't want a flame),
- d. Lighter (the long stemmed lighters work best).

Step 2: Set Up

- a. Decide where to set up your luminaria. Many people line their walkways up to their house or their driveways or even a cool decoration in your yard. It is important when using candles to put the luminaria in a safe place such as on concrete or asphalt.
- b. Drawing on the bags or cutting out shapes can be fun, too.
- c. Wherever you choose to put the bags, fill them with about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sand or enough to fill the bottom. Place a candle in the center of the bag.

Step 3: Lighting

- a. Light the candles and enjoy a festival of lights to celebrate the Winter Solstice and bring light to the shortest day of the year.



How to Make Solstice Wreaths

Materials:

- Varied greenery cut into 6" lengths. About one 5 gallon bucket-full
- Floral wire, cut into 4" and 7" lengths
- Wire clippers
- Wreath frame (metal or twisted grape vine work best)
- Ribbon to hang wreath

Assemble packages of 3 pieces of the greenery, attached together with 4" floral wire lengths wrapped around the base of the greenery. The number of packages you will need depends on the size of the wreath frame.

Place packages on wreath frame, attaching them to the frame with the 7" floral wire lengths, and overlapping the greenery packages to cover the wire. Place all packages pointing in the same direction, tucking the last package under the first.

Adjust fullness by adding extra pieces where necessary by pushing them into the already attached packages. Trim outside edge of wreath to eliminate any greenery that projects too far.

Give wreath a good shake to make sure everything is well attached. Adjust if necessary.

Attach ribbon to back and hang.



How to Make Solstice Crowns

Materials:

1. Red, green and tan raffia, about 36" long
2. Various 3-4" pieces of vegetation, including flowers, leaves, berries and other colorful pieces

Select three pieces of raffia (can be different colors or same color) that are at least 36" long. Tie pieces together at one end leaving about a 3" "tail".

Very loosely braid pieces together until the braid is long enough to fit around your head like a crown. Tie all pieces together at end of braid, leaving the remaining unbraided raffia as the other "tail".

Select pieces of vegetation and weave the pieces into the loose braids, being sure to secure the pieces so they don't fall out. Continue to weave different pieces into the braid until your braid is as full as you like.

Tie "tails" together to form a circle the size of your head; the longer "tail" will hang down

Place on your head and enjoy!

Solstice Cider

Serve solstice cider to warm you during the short days of winter!

- 1 quart cranberry juice
- 1 can lemonade concentrate
- 3 quart water
- 2 cinnamon stick
- 10 cloves

Simmer until spicy! Serve hot!



Make Your Own Shadow Puppets



Step 1 – Cut the puppet out of cardboard. You can draw the puppet shape directly onto the cardboard or outline it on a piece of paper first to use as a pattern. You can create a stained glass effect by cutting windows into the puppet and covering them with pieces of colored cellophane.

Step 2 – Using a glue gun or tape, affix a stick or rod to the back of the puppet. You can even, fashion joints for the puppet using brass paper fasteners or wire. Attach additional rods to the joints to facilitate movement.

Step 3 – Prepare a surface for reflecting the shadows, such as a wall, screen or side of a tent.

Step 4 – Choose a light source like a spotlight, flashlight, lamp, lantern, candles or a fire. A strong light source will prevent backlight. When using a weaker light source like candles or a fire, dim other lights in the room. Angle the light source from above to shine over the performers' heads and reduce extra shadows.

Step 5 – Construct the performance area. Use a sheet and black plastic trash bags for the puppeteers to sit behind without casting a shadow. Create a scene like Mt. Tamalpais by cutting the trash bag. Tape copies of the script to the sheet for the puppeteers to read. Include an area for the puppeteers to maneuver the puppets between the light source and the shadow surface.

Step 6 – You're ready to open your show! Act out a storyline or script. Play background music to accompany the shadow movements.

Muir Woods Shadow Puppet Play

CHARACTERS:

BOBCAT (SURFER DUDE)

WOODPECKER (VERY LOUD, ALWAYS DRUMMING)

BANANA SLUG (EVERYTHING IT SAYS AND DOES IS SLOOOOOW)

RANGER (ALWAYS TRYING TO KEEP ORDER)

BAT (SINGS EVERYTHING IN AN OPERA VOICE)

MOTH (KNOW-IT-ALL)

EVERYONE – (WARMING UP THEIR SINGING VOICE IN TURN FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

WOODPECKER - (TAPPING BEAK) “Ok! Muir Woods Wildlife choir! Let’s please come together now and begin our choir practice... are you all ready to sing? (TAPPING BEAK) And 1, and 2, and 3 and...”

BOBCAT – (ENTERS, INTERRUPTING) “Sorry, I’m late to the choir practice dudes and dudettes. I was busy partying at John Muir’s house with Moth and we lost track of time!

MOTH – “Please don’t be mad, Woodpecker! It’s true! And did you know that John Muir’s favorite Christmas tree was the California Bay Laurel? I just love how they make the forest smell!”

BANANA SLUG – “It suuuuure smells looooovely. It is veeery peaceful in the woods toooniiight.”

BOBCAT – “Yah, mon. It’s real quiet and serene-like out there... what happened to all the humans?”

BAT – “The humans went home for the night to have their own solstice celebrations.”

RANGER – “That’s right, Moth. Today we humans are celebrating the shortest day of the year at Muir Woods. But tonight we are giving the forest back to you all to let you enjoy the longest night of the year. This way you can hunt, play in Redwood Creek, go for a stroll, and

have choir practice without us disrupting you.”

WOODPECKER – (Tapping Beak) “Speaking of CHOIR PRACTICE! Can we continue choir?! And 1 and 2 and...”

BAT – “Oh Redwood Treeeeee, O Redwood Treeee....”

BOBCAT – (Cutting off Bat) “So, like, it’s just us out here?”

RANGER – “Yes, that’s right Bobcat! But remember, no funny stuff.”

BANANA SLUG – “Wooooow, does that mean no humans will be waaaaaalking oooooon the trails?”

RANGER – “Yes, Banana Slug!”

BANANA SLUG – “Then I will take my slug faaaamily for a safe strooooll along the traaaail to celebrate the Soooooolstice. And we will not have to worry about being stepped oooooonnnnn”

MOTH – “That’s right, Banana Slug, you will be free to roam the trails. What will you do tonight after practice, Woodpecker?”

WOODPECKER – “I’m going to work on building up my stash of acorns for the winter. The live oaks and tan oaks in Muir Woods have such delicious acorns! I can see the humans watching me as I work to put the acorns away, and I know they’ll neeeever find them if I hide them all tonight!”

MOTH – “And Bobcat, how will you spend your evening?”

BOBCAT – “I gotta get in shape for the Mavericks tournament coming up, so I’ll totally be doing mega laps around the main trail.”

RANGER – “Bobcat, how do you like the new boardwalk leading up to the Pinchot Tree?”

BOBCAT – “Totally awesome, dude. It makes for a much smoother run. Totally righteous.”

RANGER – “That’s great Bobcat, really improving your time, I bet! The boardwalk is allowing the roots to reach and grow beneath the trail, the small critters like mice and chipmunks to scurry safely under our feet, and the ground is feeding the extra rain to the roots instead of our boots and sneakers.”

MOTH – “And, Bat, what will you do tonight?”

BAT – “I’m going to take advantage of the quiet to hunt for flies and

I'm going to eat an extra big Solstice meal tonight!"

MOTH – "Well Bat, Bobcat, Woodpecker and Banana Slug, I'm thrilled you have such great plans for this quiet evening. Stay safe out there and enjoy the night."

WOODPECKER – "Class! Can we wrap things up with a song? How about O Redwood Tree? Everybody ready? And 1 and 2 and..."

EVERYONE SINGS:

O Redwood Tree! O Redwood Tree!
Thou tree so fair and lovely
O Redwood Tree! O Redwood Tree!
Thou tree so fair and lovely.

The sight of thee at Solstice tide,
Spreads hope and gladness far and wide.

O Redwood Tree! O Redwood Tree!
Thou tree so fair and lovely



WOODPECKER – (TAPPING BEAK) "Choir that was wonderful! Thank you for coming to practice tonight."

PUPPETS TAKE A BOW



The Winter Solstice

Every year, around the 21st of December, the sun reaches its southernmost point at the Tropic of Capricorn. In the Northern Hemisphere, this is known as Winter Solstice—the shortest day and longest night of the year. From time immemorial it has been celebrated as a major turning point in the yearly cycle of light and life—joyous reaffirmation of the continuation of life and our ties to the cycles of nature.

The evergreen tree has long been a mainstay of solstice traditions. Trees seem to embody the cycle of nature itself — they grow and make sounds, give birth to flowers and fruits, become old and die. They symbolize fertility and life, strength and an enduring spirit.

It was the strength and enduring spirit of John Muir who inspired William and Elizabeth Kent to ensure the protection of this stand of “evergreens,” or coast redwood trees over 100 years ago. Muir Woods, one of the last un-cut stands of old-growth redwoods in the Bay Area, continues to provide awe and wonder to visitors from around the world. More importantly, it provides shelter and security to one of the planet’s richest and most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life.

Let us celebrate Winter Solstice among these gentle giants and let the enduring spirit of those who protect this forest inspire and guide us to carry on their legacy.



We Wish You a Merry Solstice

We wish you a merry solstice
We wish you a merry solstice
We wish you a merry solstice
And a happy new year!

We welcome the winter season
We welcome the winter season
We welcome the winter season
Say goodbye to the Fall

Let's sing to bless all nature
Let's sing to bless all nature
Let's sing to bless all nature
And bring peace on earth

These trees, they will be a listening
These trees, they will be a listening
These trees, they will be a listening
To each song we sing

We wish you a merry solstice
We wish you a merry solstice
We wish you a merry solstice
And a happy new year!

I'm Dreaming of a Green Solstice

(Adapted by Bill Oliver)

I'm dreaming of a Green Solstice
With green believers everywhere.
Where the trees live long lives
And wildlife survives
There is hope for water, land and
air.

I'm dreaming of a Green Solstice
With each recycled card I write.
May your streams flow fully and
clean
And may all your Solstices be
green.

O Redwood Tree

O redwood tree, O redwood tree!
Thou tree so fair and lovely
O redwood tree, O redwood tree!
Thou tree fair and lovely.

The sight of thee at Solstice tide,
Spreads hope and gladness far and
wide.

O, redwood tree, O redwood tree!
Thou tree so fair and lovely.

The Official Oncorhynchus Song

(Adapted by Joanne Jarvis sung to the tune of Oklahoma)

Oncorhynchus

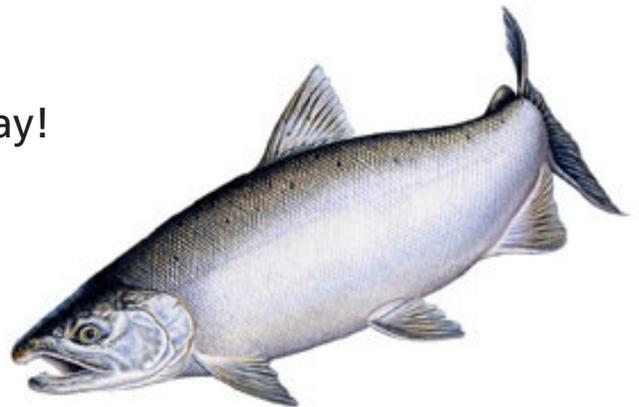
Comes splish splish splashing up the creek
With her waiving tail, she'll dig a redd
And put her babies in to sleep.
Then in 85 days they'll be fry
Who turn into smolt and say "goodbye!"

Oncorhynchus

Goes heading out to sea
Where she'll play and frolic and have some fun
'Til she turns the tender age of three.
Then it's back to the creek she will come
Where she'll spawn and then she's done.

OH! Onco Onco rhynchus rhynchus
Onco onco rhynchus rhynchus

You're endangered Oncorhynchus
But, Oncorhynchus you're here to stay!



The Twelve Days of Solstice

On the 1st Day of Solstice

A Ranger showed to me

A Spotted Owl in a Redwood Tree

On the 2nd Day of Solstice

A Ranger showed to me

Two Pond Turtles

And a Spotted Owl in a Redwood Tree

3rd Day of Solstice

Three Varied Thrushes

4th Day of Solstice

Four California Quail

5th Day of Solstice

Five Golden Poppies

6th Day of Solstice

Six Bay Trees Leaning

7th Day of Solstice

Seven Salmon Spawning

8th Day of Solstice

Eight Milkmaids Blooming

9th Day of Solstice

Nine Moles a digging

10th Day of Solstice

Ten Frogs a Leaping

11th Day of Solstice

Eleven Jays a Cawing

12th Day of Solstice

Twelve Redwoods Sprouting



Ya Mon Salmon

Ooh yeah!
All right!

We're salmon (salmon)
I wanna swim up wid you
We're salmon (salmon)
And I hope you like salmon, too

From the ocean to the creek, we
can make it in a week
Once the rain begins anew
Every year we pay the price with a
little sacrifice
Spawning til our lives are through

We're salmon (salmon)
Don't think that salmon are a
thing of the past
We're salmon (salmon)
And we know we salmon gonna
last

Waterfalls can't stop us now, we
can jump them anyhow
To where the water's nice and cold
Through the day and through the
night, we won't go without a fight
Our lives are worth much more
than gold

We're salmon (salmon, salmon,
salmon)
And we're salmon on our way to
the top
We're salmon (salmon, salmon,
salmon)
We're salmon and we just won't
stop

Great Mount Tamalpais
Great Mount Tamalpais
We'll go to Tamalpais
And spawn for procreation

We're salmon (salmon, salmon,
salmon)
I wanna swim up wid you
We're salmon, we're salmon,
we're salmon, we're salmon
We're salmon, we're salmon,
we're salmon, we're salmon
Hope you like salmon, too



Would you like to learn more about Winter Solstice? Check out these books:

The Return of the LIGHT — Twelve Tales From Around the World for the Winter Solstice by Carolyn McVickar Edwards, Marlowe & Company, New York, 2000

The Winter Solstice by Ellen Jackson, The Millbrook Press, Brookfield, Connecticut, 1997

Green Man, The Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth by William Anderson, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1990

The Winter Solstice — The Sacred Traditions of Christmas by John Matthews, Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1998

Celebrate the Solstice: Honoring the Earth's Seasonal Rhythms through Festival and Ceremony by Richard Heinberg, Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House, 1993

The Shortest Day: Celebrating the Winter Solstice by Wendy Pfeffer, Dutton's Children's Books, 2003



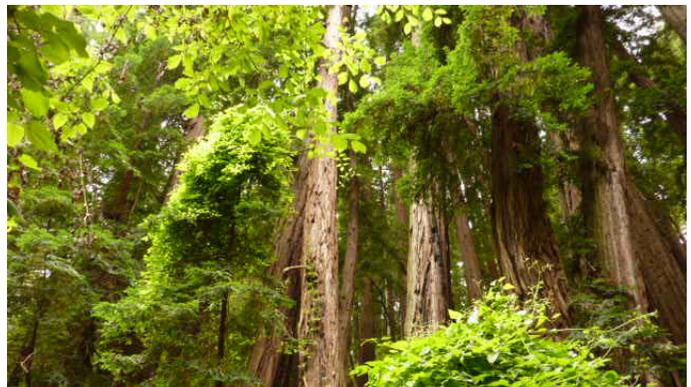
An Evergreen Year

On the Winter Solstice we celebrate the turning of the year. In this season of darkness we come together for reflection and ceremony through the longest nights of the year. Water runs everywhere, the ocean draws back and surges in for the extreme tides, clouds cover the horizon. Yet we feel the stirrings of new life in the return of the salmon, the new fern frond unfurling, and the mushrooms pushing up from fertile ground. This is also a time to celebrate renewal, of the earth and of the spirit.

It is also a time of sharing, coming together as people always have in the "commons", now the public land we call a national park. A time to strengthen our bonds in the common kinship of all life. As days grow longer, light returns again. On Solstice we recognize the cycle of life through wreaths, the importance of light through the connection of the sun to the trees to the fire through a warming bonfire. We offer story, song, tradition from many cultures to wish our community a holiday season filled with warmth, friendship and good cheer.

As the days begin to grow longer and the light returns once again, we wish you a holiday season filled with warmth, love and good cheer!

Muir Woods Rangers and Volunteers



When the longest night of the year is here, our friends and family gather near to light a candle against the night and warm our spirits in the wonder of light.

Our Family Traditions...



