

Winter 2024

The ParkNextDoor

magazine



Finding The Sparkle

Look Inside For:

Holiday Light Shows In The Parks, The World's Tallest Glass Tree, Homestead Holidays, Candlelight Hikes, First Day Hikes, Backyard Nature Diaries, Holiday Gift Guide For Nature Lovers and more!



Season's Greetings, All ~

How is it December already? Just two weeks ago there were still calendula blooms opening in my backyard garden. Unusual, yes. But still welcome. And now, the blustery cold has settled in. We've had to put out our heated birdbath for the backyard wildlife. The great thing about the heated birdbath is that it tends to invite in more visitors. Birds that might not stop by regularly, have discovered this precious winter water source and they are coming by daily. Now that they've found us, I'm hoping they continue to return to the garden throughout the year.

With all the activity this final month of the year brings, it's easy to be overwhelmed. We've got features to entertain, to celebrate, and to help you calm down when the pace gets to be too much. As always, our local nature spots can be a great source of seasonal joy and peace. Whichever you need, there are plenty of options.

From holiday lights to candlelight, there is plenty of sparkle to go around. In need of a bit of peace on a nature trail? *Find A Quiet Space* will point you to 29 parks and preserves to escape to when the going gets rough. One of my favorite quiet spaces is *The Conservancy For Healing & Heritage* in Franklin. It's the spotlight park this issue.

If you're still tackling your holiday gift list we have options. *Gifts For The Nature Lover* is packed with tried and true options, as well as a few unique ideas. It's a great resource all year through.

I'm a big fan of Christmas music. In the *Bits & Pieces* feature, I share a link to a blog post from last year that took a trip down memory lane of some of my holiday favorites. Maybe some are yours, too.

If you're one for cozying up with a good read, I'll introduce you two of my recent favorites by nature writer Margaret Renkl, in *A New Year Of Noticing*. I also invite you to check out my personal release **From Season To Season - Healing Through Nature, Selections From The Blog**. It's free on the website.

And, finally, as this year comes to a close, I'd like to say *Thank You, Dear Readers*. I've been on this website and blog journey now for ten years, and I'm grateful to have you with me. Hopeful that I can continue to explore this beautiful state and share more of its natural wonders with you.

Here's wishing you and yours a happy and peaceful holiday season. And a new year filled with adventures gone local.

Cheers!
Kimberly



A traveler, singer, novice photographer, humane gardener, and nature lover. Documenting and sharing the beauty that is Wisconsin since 2014.

Cover photo taken at
Greenfield Park,
in West Allis, WI

What's Inside

Bundle up, winter's here! Early sunsets, chilly temps, snowfalls, and the holiday season. Lack of daylight, packed schedules, and high expectations can be a challenge. But there are ways to celebrate this time of year without wearing ourselves out. Our parks and preserves provide plenty of opportunity to enjoy the winter solstice, the holidays, and the coming snow days.

If the rush to daily darkness is bringing you down, add some sparkle and brightness with a trip through holiday light shows in the parks. **Let The Lights Shine** will introduce you to 29 festive light displays that provide a bit of cheer and magic this holiday season. Some are drive-thru, some walking tours, and some offer both options. Either way, they'll bring some merriment to the dark winter evenings for you and yours.

Have you seen The World's Tallest Glass Tree? Head to Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay for this one of a kind holiday event. A shining glass tree is formed piece by piece from glass melted on-site, amidst a winter festival on the grounds of Yerkes Observatory. **Yerkes Observatory - The World's Tallest Glass Tree** is a fun-filled event for all.

If an old-fashioned style Christmas is more your style, check out **Homestead Holidays**, where we feature two cozy local locations where you can enjoy vintage arts and crafts, historic museums, good eats, and more.

Something about the glow of candlelight adds a little magic to the darkest hours. A warm flicker of light along nature trails in our parks and preserves invites you along for a festive evening outdoors. **Nature By Candlelight** will show you the way.

Skip the new year's resolutions, and opt outside instead with **First Day Hikes In The State Parks**. We've got a list of a dozen hikes scheduled throughout the state on New Year's Day.

If you've been wanting to try your hand at nature journaling, you'll want to check out **A New Year of Noticing**, where we introduce you two books by nature writer *Margaret Renkl*. You'll be inspired to read her diaries, and start one of your own.

If the hectic pace of the season has you stressed, take time to **Find A Quiet Space**. We've got a list of 25 parks and preserves where you can find some moments of peace and fresh air to help calm and rejuvenate you.

And speaking of peaceful, our spotlight park this issue is **The Conservancy For Healing & Heritage**, located in Franklin. If you've never been, we'll introduce you. It's a beautiful spot to find some peace all year through.

If you're stumped on what to get the nature lover in your life, check out our annual guide: **Gifts For The Nature Lover**. You'll find great gift ideas for the holidays and special occasions all year through.

There's no denying that the winter and holiday season can leave us in a funk. In **Coping With The Seasonal Blues**, I share what happens for me in the depths of winter, and how I'm trying to manage it. Maybe you can relate.

One way to combat the winter blues, or to entertain the kids during winter break, is to jump in to a fun winter craft project. Making **Holiday Ornaments For The Birds** will show you how to make homemade birdseed ornaments to feed the backyard birds during the coldest days of the year.

Add some artful elements to your day - when out for a walk in your favorite local park, look for heart shapes. Or bring your own along to photograph. **Let Nature Be Your Valentine** has some love for just that.

Finally, here are a few **Bits & Pieces** you may have missed on the website or blog that might entertain or inspire you on one of those frigid days that's just best spent indoors.

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Let The Lights Shine

Ahh, December. When darkness descends early, and the nights seem so much longer. Fortunately, the advent of holiday light displays brings a bit of brightness and cheer to cold winter nights.

No matter where you live, chances are there is a local, county or city park nearby that offers a holiday light display. Some are drive-thru only, some are walking tours.

And, if all else fails, just take an evening stroll through your neighborhood, or a drive through your local area, and enjoy the displays of family, friends and neighbors.



Festive holiday light displays add sparkle to dark winter nights.

The Milwaukee area is host to several festive light displays, with plenty of seasonal sparkle throughout the state. Be sure to watch your local news sources for information on festivities in your area as well. *Here's wishing you a cheerful holiday season!*



Wild Lights 2024 at The Milwaukee County Zoo

Bring the family and stroll through twinkling light displays at the Milwaukee County Zoo. This year's presentations will be even bigger and brighter than ever! Several of the animal buildings will be open for visiting guests on select nights, as well.

The event runs from November 30 to December 31, (closed on Dec. 2, 9, 16, 24 and 25). Evenings: 5:30 - 9:00pm (Admission gate close at 8:15pm) Tickets can be purchased online (special values available), or at the entrance gate.

Rates vary depending on membership status, etc., however, Parking Is Included. Visit the [ticket](#) site for more details.

There will be a variety of special event nights as well. Check out the event roster for a complete listing. Rates vary depending on membership status, etc., however, Parking Is Included. Visit the [ticket](#) site for more details.

Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival - Peace, Love & Lights

Downtown Milwaukee shines again as it celebrates the holiday season this year. Twinkling lights and sculptures aglow with seasonal cheer are available to all at Cathedral Square Park, Pere Marquette Park, and Zeidler Union Square. The festival begins November 21, and runs through January 1, 2025.

You can walk or drive-thru to experience the festive displays of over 500,000 lights as animated sculptures, interactive displays, and twinkling street decorations boost your holiday mood. Or purchase tickets in advance and grab a ride on the Jingle Bus for a 40-minute tour of all the lights and sights Thursday through Sunday nights. Tickets for the Jingle Bus are \$5 per person, and must be purchased in advance.



You can walk or drive-thru to experience the festive displays of over 500,000 lights as animated sculptures, interactive displays, and twinkling street decorations boost your holiday mood. Or purchase tickets in advance and grab a ride on the Jingle Bus for a 40-minute tour of all the lights and sights Thursday through Sunday nights. Tickets for the Jingle Bus are \$5 per person, and must be purchased in advance.

The Ornament Trail is back this year, which includes 15 larger than life artful adornments along Wisconsin Avenue, select locations on Water Street, and in the Third Ward. Businesses along the route will offer specials throughout the season, as well.

Check out the seasonal brochure for a wide array of festive events and activities for revelers of all ages. For a complete listing of events, pricing, and other details, you can download the festival brochure [here](#).

Have a seat amidst the sparkle of Downtown Milwaukee's Holiday Lights Festival.



Milwaukee Domes Holiday Show: A Holiday Parade

Visiting the Milwaukee Domes is always an event, but the holiday show is a perennial favorite. Enjoy hundreds of beautiful poinsettias on display among festive twinkling trees and lights. The display is currently open and runs through January 5, 2025.

This year is five times as festive as "The Domes Holiday Parade" features multicultural holiday displays in celebration of Advent, Winter Solstice, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa.

Regular Hours: Monday - Friday, 9am-5pm.
Saturday/Sunday, 9am-4pm.

Special late night at the domes events (Open until 8pm) will be held on November 29, December 10, 17, and 27. For a complete list of holiday hours, click [here](#).



Story telling events will be held on November 30, December 1, 7, and 15. On December 14 and 22, David HB Drake will present a music show. On December 27th, a special dance presentation will be performed by the Ko-Thi Dance Company. For more event details, visit their [website](#).

Tickets can be purchased at the door. Admission Fees between \$6-\$9 depending on age, and county of residence. Children under 2 yrs old admitted free of charge.



You can walk or drive through the abundantly festive annual Candy Cane Lane holiday light displays in West Allis.

Candy Cane Lane - West Allis

This annual event of neighborhood light displays takes donations for the MACC Fund, for the fight against childhood cancer. Last year they raised \$194,000 over the season!

These festive displays, all created by community residents, will cheer you and yours. The neighborhood parameters are: 96th Street to 92nd Street, from Montana Avenue to Oklahoma Avenue.

Drive or walk through this holiday season, the event runs through December 25. See their website for specific hours and more detail.



Enchantment in the Park - West Bend

This holiday light treat in Regner Park, in West Bend, has been an annual event since 2009. The displays offer both a walk-thru and drive-thru experience. Your choice.

Sponsored by the local Washington County area Rotary Clubs, this festive display is a fundraiser for local food banks. Admission is a suggested \$10 donation, or non-perishable food items (no glass containers, please).

In addition to the holiday light displays, there will be musical entertainment, along with food and drink concessions. The festival opens November 29, and runs through December 24. It is open from 5-pm to 9-pm daily. See the event calendar for special features and events.



There's plenty of enchantment along the way at West Bend's annual holiday light displays in Regner Park.



Festive reflections at Janesville Rotary Gardens Holiday Light Show.



Holiday Light Show - Rotary Botanical Gardens, Janesville

Back for the 28th year, this brilliant holiday event is held on the grounds of the Janesville Rotary Gardens. Themed light displays, animations, and twinkling walkways will lift your holiday spirits with over one-million holiday lights.

We attended this event a few years back, and it was well worth the drive to Janesville. However, it's a very well attended event. Tickets must be purchased/reserved in advance. Tickets are purchased online. Tickets prices: Free for 2 and under. \$5 for children 3-12, \$20 for those 13 and up.

Dates: Nov. 29-Dec. 1, Dec. 5-8, Dec. 12-23, Dec. 26-30, January 2-4. Evenings: 4:30-pm to 9-pm. (Last admission at 8:30pm, lights go dark at 9pm) [Reservations/Tickets](#) required purchase online in advance.

Beaver Dam Rotary Lights - Swan City Park, Beaver Dam

This charming holiday light display marks the 8th year of cheer sponsored by the Rotary Club of Beaver Dam. The park square, located in the heart of Beaver Dam, features a walkways of Christmas trees decorated with seasonal flair by local businesses and organizations. The bandshell has an orchestra of lit of trees accompanied by holiday music.

Lights go on at 4:45pm each day, and remain lit until midnight. Plenty of time to take a stroll through solo, or with friends and family in tow. Admission is free, however, donations are being accepted to raise funds for restoration of the Historic Springhouse structure in the park.

The event runs November 29, 2024 to January 1, 2025. Parking spots are located along the street surrounding the square.



Festive and jolly with a stage full of lit up trees and cheerful seasonal music at Swan Park in Beaver Dam.



22 MORE HOLIDAY LIGHT EVENTS ACROSS THE STATE

Making Spirits Bright - Sheboygan

Christmas In The Falls - Menomonee Falls

Illuminate Ozaukee - Cedarburg

Christmas Carnival of Lights - Jellystone Park, Caledonia

Lake Geneva Trolley Tour Of Lights - Lake Geneva

Garden of Lights - Green Bay

Miller Holiday Lites Drive-thru Light Show - Miller Valley, Milwaukee

Enchant Christmas Light Maze - Milwaukee/Franklin Field

Holiday Fantasy in Lights - Madison

Celebration of Lights - Oshkosh

La Crosse Rotary Lights - La Crosse

Country Christmas - Pewaukee

Kids2Kids Christmas Wonderland - Grafton

East Troy Lights - East Troy

Lake Ripley Holiday Lights - Cambridge

Lights in Lincoln Park - Manitowoc

Marshfield Rotary Winter Wonderland - Marshfield

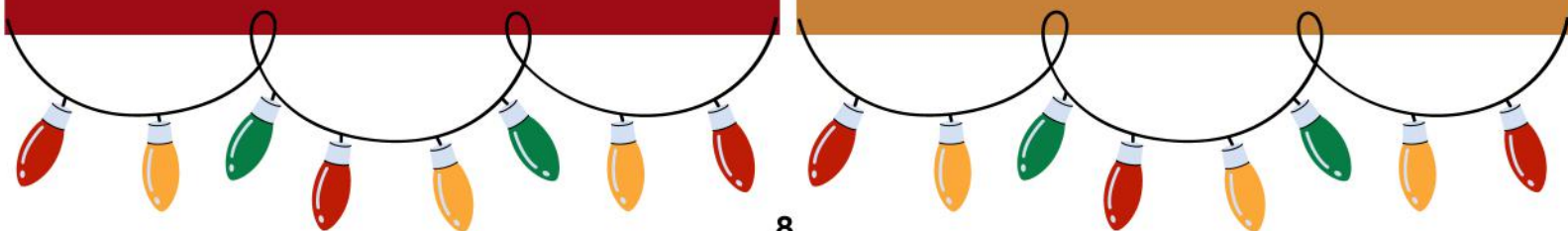
Light the Square - Oak Creek

Sam's Christmas Village & Light Tour - Somerset

Christmas Village at Irvine Park - Chippewa Falls

Lakeside Park Holiday Light Show - Fond du Lac

Tree of Light - Wisconsin Dells



Yerkes Observatory & The World's Tallest Glass Tree

December 2024



Celebrate the holiday season with a unique, artful festival and event hosted by the historic *Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay*.

Join in the fun and watch as a sparkling, blown glass Christmas tree rises against the backdrop of the Observatory. Made piece by piece, from donated glass melted down, it's a one-of-a-kind way to celebrate the holidays.

Food trucks, hot and cold drink vendors, as well as arts and crafts sellers, will be on-site, too!

Festival Dates: December 6, 7, 8, and 13, 14, 15. The star will be placed atop the tree on December 15.

Tickets May Be Purchased In Advance or on-site: Entrance price is \$5 per person for anyone over 9 years of age.

Observatory Micro-Tour: This 25-minute mini-tour of the Yerkes Observatory showcases the marble rotunda, along with a walk up the stairs to see the world's largest refracting telescope.

Tickets/Reservations for the Micro-Tour must be purchased in advance. Tickets are \$20 per adult, \$10 for ages 7-17, children 6 and under enter free.



Homestead Holidays

Locally owned garden centers and historic sites and museums can offer a unique way to enjoy and shop for the holidays. These are tried and true small businesses that have existed in our communities for many years. Here are two you might enjoy this season, and throughout the year as well.

Northwind Perennial Farm

I've been visiting Northwind Perennial for plants and other necessities during the growing season for many years now. But I also truly enjoy visiting their Christmas Shoppe each year for artful and vintage holiday gifts. Just browsing the beautifully landscaped grounds, and the shopping barns are a treat alone.

If you're looking to shop small and skip the mall, pay a visit to Northwind Perennial.

Christmas Shoppe Open Nov. 16 - Dec. 15
Open Thursday-Sundays, 10am - 3pm
Located in Burlington, WI



Fresh holiday greens, vintage decor, and original artist pieces make for great holiday gifts.



Tickets must be purchased in advance.
Located in Eagle, WI.

Old World Wisconsin

Old World Wisconsin is 600 acres of homesteading history and demonstrations located in the Southern Kettle Moraine. Focused on heartland living from the 1840's to 1910's, you can explore the various museums, take workshops, and enjoy a plethora of interactive experiences.

Home For The Holidays is a nostalgic, Victorian celebration that takes place *Saturdays and Sundays, on December 7-8 and 14-15, from 10am - 5pm.*

Wagon rides, demonstrations, good eats, holiday crafts, and unique shopping are just some of the highlights.



Nature By Candlelight

The darkness of winter can feel relentless. Thankfully, many Wisconsin preserves and state parks offer candlelight hikes during the winter months. The perfect occasion to venture out with friends and family to enjoy a brisk evening hike along trails warmed by the glow of candlelight. Most followed by campfires and hot chocolate. Check out the links below to find one near you.

Lac Lawrann Conservancy
West Bend
Jan 18, 2025
5pm - 7pm

Horicon Marsh Visitor Center
Horicon Marsh
January 18, 2025
5pm - 9pm

Wildcat Mountain State Park
Hike, Ski and Snowshoe
Jan 11, 2025 5pm - 9pm
Feb. 1, 2025 6pm - 8pm

Newport State Park
Ski, Hike and Snowshoe
Feb. 8, 2025 5:30 - 8pm

MacKenzie Center
Snowshoe Candlelight Hike
Feb. 21, 2025 4:30pm - 7:30pm





Happy
New Year

First Day Hikes In The State Parks

Start the new year off right with a hike in one of Wisconsin's beautiful state parks or nature areas. There are a dozen scheduled **New Year's Day** hikes across the state. Some are guided hikes, some self-guided. Many of them offer a bonfire and warm beverages at the finish. It's a festive way to start off the new year, and a warm way to cap off a hike in the winter chill. Click the links for more details.

Scuppernong Springs
Nature Trail
11am - 2pm

Council Grounds
State Park
11am - 1pm

Devil's Lake
State Park
11am - 1pm

Richard Bong State
Recreation Area
12pm - 2pm

Kettle Moraine State Forest
Pike Lake Unit
12pm - 2pm

Straight Lake
State Park
1pm - 3pm

Newport State Park
1pm - 3:30pm

Copper Falls
State Park
1pm - 4pm

Interstate State Park
1pm - 3pm

Buckhorn State Park
1pm - 2:30pm

Roche-A-Cri
State Park
1pm - 2:30pm

Red Cedar State Trail
12pm - 2pm



A New Year Of Noticing

One of the most heralded nature books of 2024 was ***The Comfort Of Crows - A Backyard Year***, by Margaret Renkl. Renkl approaches the book as a diary of sorts. A diary of observing the natural world within her backyard, and, on occasion, other locations in her home state of Tennessee. Renkl is an expert in the fine art of noticing.

The book was one of my favorites of 2024. I've already read it twice, and some chapters more than that. You can read my full review of it in the [On The Bookshelf](#) feature page of my website.

This fall a companion to *The Comfort Of Crows* was released - ***Leaf, Cloud, Crow - A Weekly Backyard Journal***. An exquisite nature diary, the book begins with an introduction by Renkl, and a section on how to use the journal. Also included are some of the diary entries from *The Comfort Of Crows*. The journal itself begins, as Margaret Renkl did in *The Comfort Of Crows*, on the winter solstice, and goes on from there with space for weekly journal entries over the next four seasons.

Renkl is a well-practiced observer, and with this journal encourages the reader to tune in to their surrounding nature. From the simplest observation of birds in the trees, fireflies, wildflowers and native bees, to the wildlife that wanders through our yards in the night, and more. If you're looking for a new year's resolution, make it something enjoyable. Resolve to learn the fine art of noticing. You'll be rewarding yourself along the way by connecting to the natural world that resides just outside your doorstep, and beyond.

**"And the more you observe,
the more you will fall in love
with the wild world that you
belong to, too"**
~ Margaret Renkl

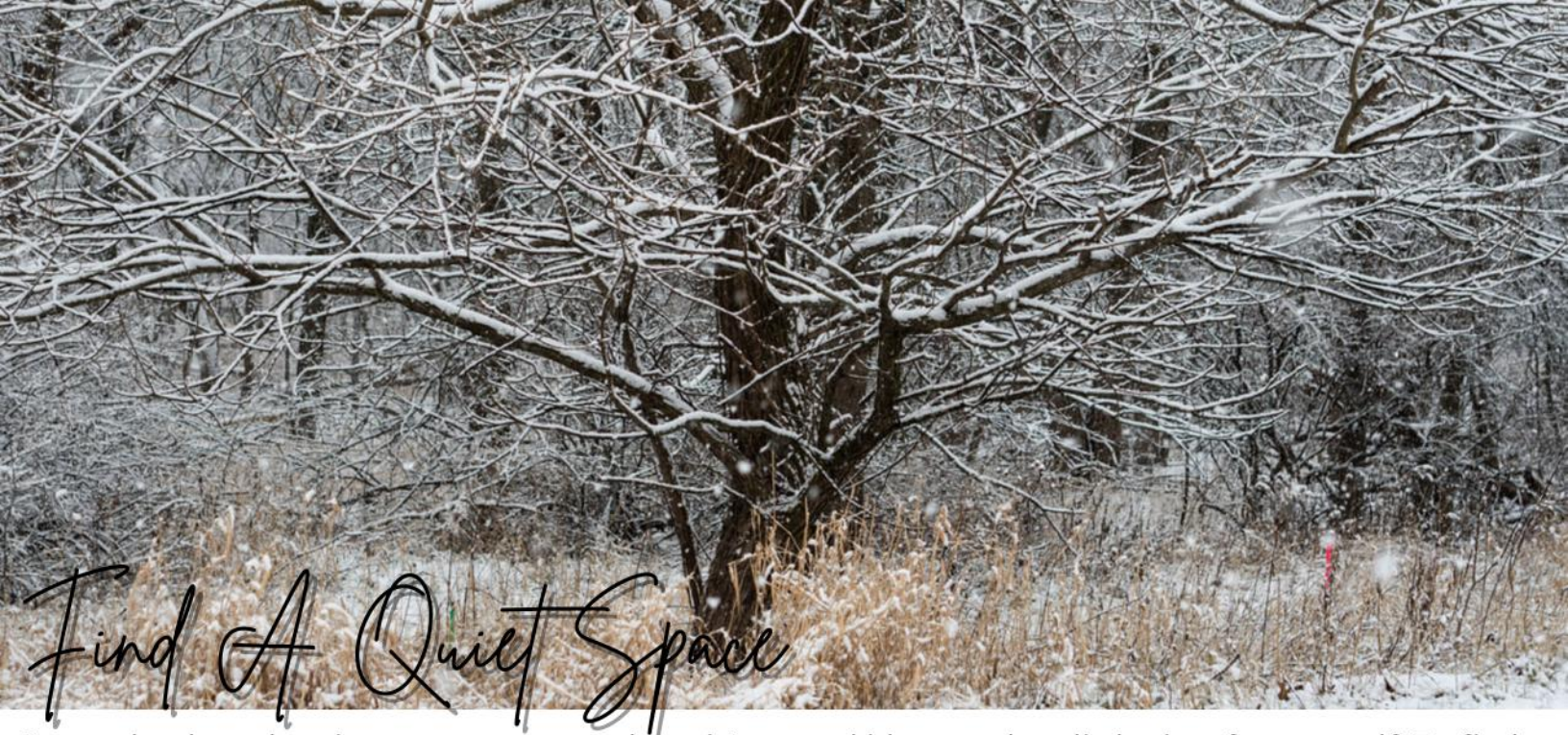
The Comfort Of Crows A Backyard Year by Margaret Renkl

Published: October 24, 2023
Publisher: Spiegel & Grau

Leaf, Cloud, Crow A Weekly Backyard Journal by Margaret Renkl

Published: October 1, 2024
Publisher: Spiegel & Grau





Find A Quiet Space

As another long, hectic year comes to a close, it's a good idea to take a little time for yourself. To find a quiet space to take in some fresh air, to wander unencumbered, to reflect, or just let your thoughts and worries wind down. I, personally, find it helpful.

Lucky for us, Wisconsin parks and nature spaces, especially after a gentle snowfall, can be just that quiet space. So put on those winter boots, bundle up, and take a little me time. Here are 25 scenic, peaceful winter walks to consider.



Humboldt Park - Milwaukee



Washington Park - Milwaukee



Havenwoods State Forest - Milwaukee



Jackson Park - Milwaukee



Retzer Nature Center - Waukesha



Deer Creek Sanctuary - New Berlin



McCarty Park - West Allis



Whitnall School Forest - Greenfield



Wehr Nature Center - Hales Corners



Scout Lake Park - Greenfield



Conservancy For Heating & Heritage - Franklin



Jean McGraw Memorial Nature Preserve - Kenosha



Forest Exploration Center - Wauwatosa



Schoen Laufen Park - Germantown



Ridge Run Park - West Bend



Lac Lawrann Conservancy - West Bend



Harrington Beach State Park - Belgium



Kohler-Andrae State Park - Sheboygan



Lion's Den Nature Preserve - Grafton



Gottfried Prairie & Arboretum - Fond du Lac



Natureland County Park - Whitewater



Wadewitz Nature Camp - Rochester



Beckman Mill County Park - Beloit



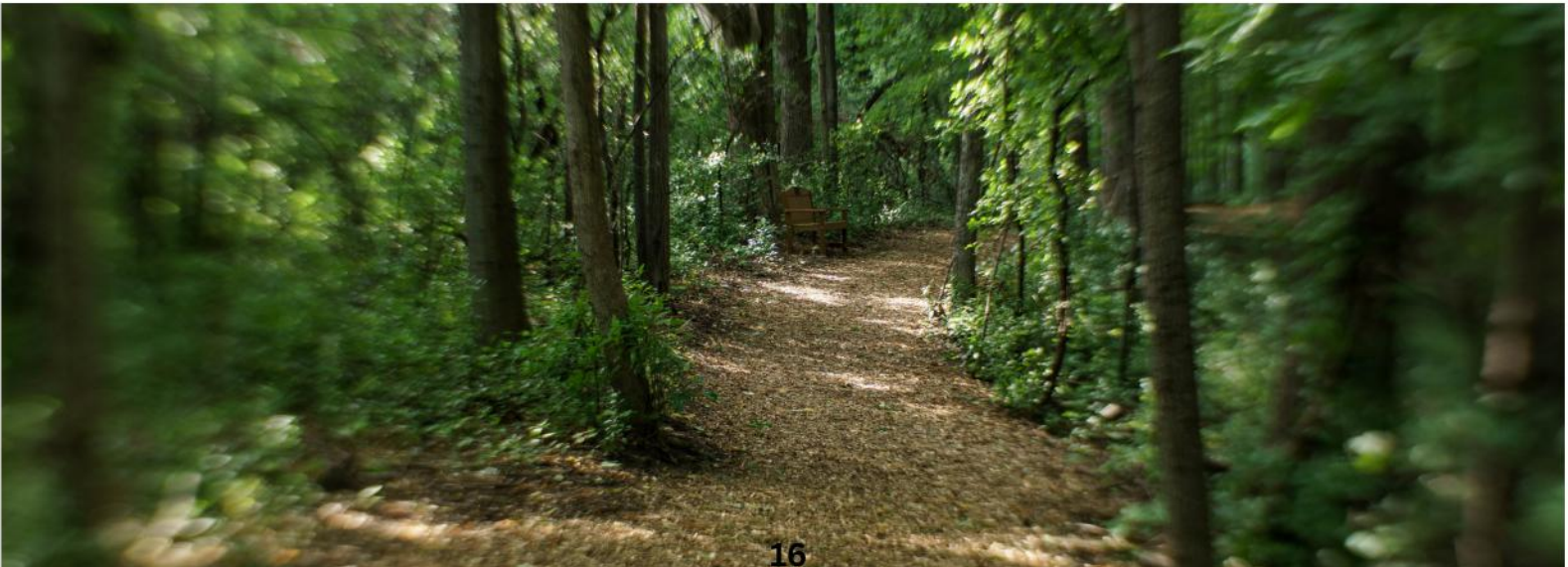
Carver-Roehl County Park - Clinton



Lake Kegonsa State Park - Stoughton



Located behind the parking lot of the Reiman Cancer Center at 74th and Rawson in Franklin, the Conservancy is part of a 36-acre natural habitat, and includes The Reiman Healing Chapel, WE Energies Foundation Healing Garden, walking trails, and Kopmeier Lake. Their mission is to welcome all who seek wellness, respite, and peace. *Nature heals.* The Conservancy embraces, and shares, the concept. They also partner with other local organizations and groups to provide opportunities for nature education, and hold classes and lectures in the healing chapel. Class and lecture fees may apply.





The walking trail loop is short, under a mile. There is a large wooden staircase that leads from the upper level down to the lake level trail, and past the newly completed lake pier. That loops back to the mid-way trail, which is a bit steep, but very manageable, and on up to the main level and the healing gardens. There are many benches along the way, and some overlook decks as well. Plenty of opportunity to sit and relax, bird-watch, meditate on the surroundings.



A visit to the Healing Chapel is quiet, peaceful, contemplative, and comes with a stellar view of the surrounding natural environment. If you're visiting, take a few minutes to enjoy this calming space.





Gifts For The Nature Lover

We live busy lives. And then the holidays come along and things get even busier. Holiday shopping doesn't have to amp up your stress level. Gift-giving should be thoughtful, but it doesn't have to be hard.

Keep it simple and you can't go wrong. Take the stress out of holiday shopping with these gift ideas for the nature lovers, hikers, birders, gardeners and nature photographers in your life.

Need a gift for a nature lover for a birthday, a thank you, or other occasion? This guide can be useful all year long.

In the meantime,
Happiest of holidays to all!



Simple gifts with a nature motif are always thoughtful.



Support Your Local Artists and Small Businesses:

Watch your local newspaper outlets and social media feeds for local holiday craft fairs and markets. You can even search on markets like ETSY by region, so, even if you are shopping online, you can narrow it down to artists in your area.

Local craft boutiques and shops are a big part of our communities. They feature the creations of a lot of talented local artists, makers, photographers and more, offering truly special gift items. Many of them nature-themed.



Give a Gift to the Earth:

Many organizations offer the purchase/adoption of seedlings for forest restoration in Wisconsin, and in other parts of the United States.

Locally, the [Forest Exploration Center in Wauwatosa](#) features an *Adopt A Seedling* program. They offer four different types of seedlings, at differing price points. Or you can even create a custom donation in honor of your recipient.

A thoughtful gift, and it's good for the planet.



You can adopt a seedling through Forest Exploration Center's ADOPT A SEEDLING program.

Easy does it. Sometimes the easiest gifts are the best ones. Give the gift that keeps on giving all year long with annual park stickers, passes, and nature center memberships.

Wisconsin State, National, & County Park Stickers:

Fortunately, annual stickers are now available to purchase online. They sometimes have special combo packages available during the holidays.

[Wisconsin State Park Sticker](#)

[A National Park Sticker](#)

[Waukesha County Parks Sticker](#)

[Washington County Parks Sticker](#)

[Marinette County Parks Sticker](#)



A foggy day at Kohler-Andrae State Park.



Nature Center Memberships:

- Schlitz Audubon Nature Center
- Wehr Nature Center
- Boerner Botanical Gardens
- River Bend Nature Center
- Riveredge Nature Center
- Retzer Nature Center
- Urban Ecology Center
- Pringle Nature Center
- Maywood Environmental Park

Tip: Most nature centers have great gift shops. Opt outside at a nature center for some exploration, then do a little holiday season shopping in their gift shops!



Want to gift to someone not in the Milwaukee area? Check out this resource for [Nature Centers Across Wisconsin](#)



Magazine Publication Subscriptions:

You can't go wrong with books and magazine subscriptions that focus on a persons interests. Following are just a few suggestions.

- Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine
- Birds&Blooms Magazine
- Our Wisconsin Magazine
- Birding Magazine
- Outside Magazine - Online Subscription
- Mammoth Tales - Ice Age Trail Alliance Magazine



Books for the Wisconsin Hiker and Local Park Explorer

Exploreer's Guide - 50 Hikes in Wisconsin

Best Easy Day Hikes - Milwaukee

Ice Age Trail Guidebook

The Milwaukee Bucket List: 101 Real Milwaukee Adventures - *by Barbara Ali*

The Milwaukee River Greenway - *by Eddee Daniel*

Around Wisco - The Ice Age Trail - *by Cameron Gillie*

Time, Beauty, and Grief: A Hike Through Wisconsin's 50 State Parks - *by Betsy Korbinyr*



Guides to Wisconsin's parks, preserves, and trails cover a lot of ground.



Specialized Outdoor Gear:

There are some great Milwaukee area shops that can help you find the perfect gear for a variety of outdoor enthusiasts on your list.

Boots, socks, scarves, jackets, hats, and more are perfect for all levels of outdoor enthusiasts.

Sherper's A wide selection of outdoor gear, including boots, camping equipment, binoculars and more can be found at this Milwaukee area local outdoor gear shop

Stan's Fit For Your Feet Hiking Boots, Socks and Accessories

Yellow Wood - A Premier Outdoor Gear Shop

Patagonia - An outdoor clothing and gear company that, for over 30 years, has been giving back 1% of its profits towards preservation and restoration of the natural environment.

REI Co-op: Gear and clothing for a wide array of outdoor enthusiasts.



Books For The Birder

Whether you've been birding for years, or are just getting started, there are books of interest in every way. Books for birders include guides, tales of birding adventures, the science of birds, art inspired by birds, the healing power of birds, and more. Here are a few that I have come to love.

[Field Guide to the Birds of Wisconsin](#) by Charles Hagner

[The Wonder of Birds: What They Tell Us About Ourselves, the World, and a Better Future](#) - by Jim Robbins

[Kingbird Highway: The Biggest Year in a Life of an Extreme Birder](#) - by Kenn Kaufman

[National Geographic Kids Guide of Birding North America](#)
[One More Warbler](#) by Victor Emanuel

[A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration](#) - by Kenn Kaufman

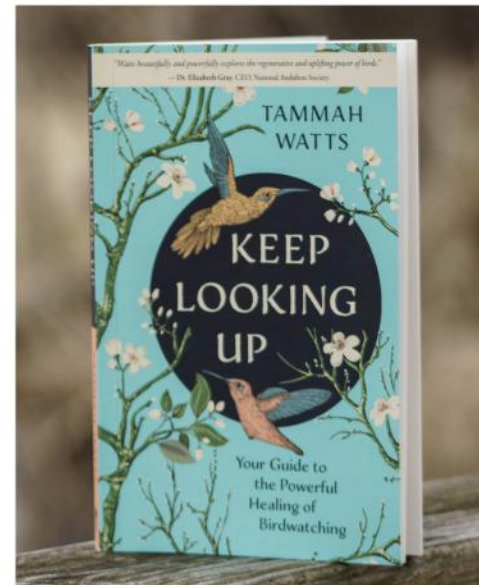
[The Backyard Bird Chronicles](#) - by Amy Tan

[The Thing with Feathers: The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human](#) - by Noah Strycker

[The Urban Birder](#) by David Lindo

[This Is A Book for People Who Love Birds](#) - Danielle Belleny (author)
Stephanie Singleton (illustrator)

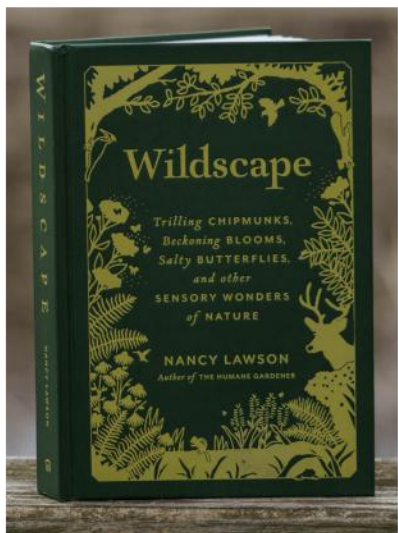
[Keep Looking Up: Your Guide to the Powerful Healing of Birdwatching](#) - Tammah Watts





Books For The Nature Lover and Gardening for Wildlife

Some of these titles are not recently published works, but are favorites of mine, and the selection spans a variety of nature subjects, from native plant gardening, to attracting birds to your habitat.



[The Urban Bestiary](#) - by Lyanda Lynn Haupt

[Humane Gardener: Nurturing a Backyard Habitat for Wildlife](#) - by Nancy Lawson

[The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature](#) - by J. Drew Lanham

[Wildlife in Your Garden](#) - edited by Karen Lanier

[Attracting Birds, Butterflies, and Other Backyard Wildlife](#) - by David Mizejewski for the National Wildlife Federation

[Braiding Sweetgrass](#) by Robin Wall Kimmerer

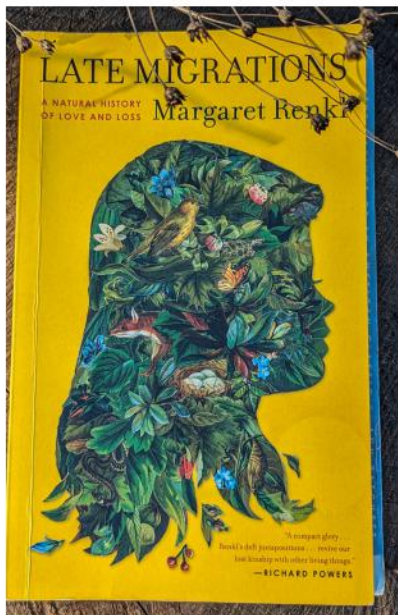
[Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard](#) - by William Tallamy

[Late Migrations: A Natural History of Love and Loss](#) - Margaret Renkl

[Wildscape: Trilling Chipmunks, Beckoning Blooms, Salty Butterflies, and Other Sensory Wonders of Nature](#) - Nancy Lawson

[Restoring Prairie Woods and Pond: How a Small Trail Can Make a Big Difference](#) - Laurie Lawlor

[The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating](#) - Elisabeth Tova Bailey





Bird Watching and Backyard Birding Gear



Wild Birds Unlimited Stores - Bird feeders of all kinds, bird food of all kinds, bird baths, books on birding, and a wealth of knowledge in feeding backyard birds.

Bird Collective - A great online shop that offers all kinds of unique merchandise for birders, and fans of birds. Bonus: 20% of their profits are donated to projects that help to reverse the decline of bird populations.

Nocs Provisions - Compact, high quality, colorful binoculars in multiple styles.

Stein's Garden & Home - Wild bird feeders and food in several Wisconsin locations.

The Nest - Unique shop in Greendale that carries bird feeding supplies, along with unique bird enthusiast gifts and decor.

Stoned Birdhouse: Functional Yard Art - made locally. Birdhouses, bird feeders, gourmet birdseed wreaths, and more.

Birds Choice - Bird feeders, bird houses, and more, made from recycled materials in Chilton, Wisconsin.





Gifts for a Nature Photographer

Camera gear is personal, and can be expensive to give. But a world of accessories for photographers make great gifts.

Extra Camera Memory SD Cards (the more memory the better)

Selfie Sticks; Portable, bendable, tripods

Gift Card for prints or books at their favorite photo print shop

Arts Cameras Plus - Camera gear, photo processing, classes. Gift cards available for gear or workshops and classes

Mike Crivellos - Camera gear, photo processing

Wildtree - Uniquely designed, handmade, camera straps and more.

Moment Mobile lenses for smartphones

A walking stick/monopod. One accessory, two great uses. Styles, durability, and prices vary. But even the cheapest ones are handy to have on-hand.

Accessories: extra dust blowers, cleaning cloths, a mini mount or tripod for on-the-go smartphone shots.

The Smartphone Photography Guide by Pete Cope



Coping With The Seasonal Blues

Whether it's all the hoopla from the holidays, or the post-holiday crash, the onset of the winter blues is no myth. They are real as can be. Combined with the loss of daylight during winter months, holiday stress, and the cold Wisconsin weather, the blues will come. And, in my experience, they are in no hurry to move on.

It's a difficult time of year for so many. The holidays, marketed as the season of good cheer, can also bring a multitude of sadness, grief, and loneliness into our lives. The loss of loved ones, whether through death, distance, or parting of ways, feels more profound in a season where togetherness is billed as the ultimate goal. I'm not saying we shouldn't strive for that togetherness. I crave it, too.



But what comes after the holidays, dear January, for me has been a definite challenge. As far back as I can recall, I have struggled in month number one. The cold, the long dark days, the mental and emotional aftermath of the holiday season, hardly leaves me with a lot of forward thinking spirit in the new year. My one resolution (of sorts), come January each year, is just to get through it.

The good and bad news about this is that I'm not alone. In speaking with friends and acquaintances, even just perusing articles on the web, it's clear that lots of people struggle at this time of year. January seems like the longest month. The weather and the darkness are just a part of it. Maybe our expectations are just too high.

How to deal with this malaise? This funk? This sadness? When my winter self feels lost, sluggish, and stymied, I go searching for ideas elsewhere. I watch YouTube videos by creatives I admire, read non-fiction essays about feeling lost, then found. Commiserating with others somehow seems to help, too.



Then I get outside. Some days it takes a lot of prodding to get out the door. But once I do, I go somewhere familiar. One of my favorite local parks with a paved walking trail that I can usually count on to be plowed.

Once I get there, with each walking step I can feel my shoulders drop a bit, the fog lift some, I can think again. I can entertain ideas. I can see a way forward.



Last January, after struggling for a while, I decided to try and incorporate a creative activity or two that I haven't done before into my week. Engaging with a new craft or skill can reinvigorate the creative self. Writing and photography may be my usual endeavors, but crocheting, crafting valentine's, even coloring or playing with watercolor paints while watching a program or listening to music, helps to clear the mental clutter and distract it for a while.

I'll sometimes gift my creations, or take them with me on a walk, so I can photograph them in nature. Adding some color to a bland winter landscape, infusing some cheer until bits of spring start to appear.

I can't imagine a January where I don't struggle with this seasonal melancholy. But maybe I should be planning for it, instead of just expecting to have to cope with it. It's worth a try.

What The Experts Advise:

The National Institutes of Health suggests:

- 1) Get outside and take in some bright sunlight, particularly early in the day.
- 2) Get a bit of exercise. Go for a walk. Something you would normally do.
- 3) Connect with others. Meet up with a friend, confide in someone you trust.
- 4) Eat nutritious foods. Try to avoid overloading on carbs and sweets.
- 5) Be patient. It takes time to improve.

Visit www.theparknextdoor.com to find some sunlight at a park near you.



If you have thoughts of suicide, get help right away. Call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Holiday Ornaments For The Birds



If you search "birdseed ornaments" on Pinterest, you'll get a plethora of results. It's clearly a popular winter project.

Two years ago I made frozen versions with water, seed, and fruits. Of course, they melt, so they don't last very long, but they were fun to make, and the birds did enjoy them while they lasted.



Last year I decided it was time to try a more durable recipe. I researched several recipes, and decided to give one of them a try. The one I chose is similar to most out there, but I did not use suet or corn syrup. It worked quite well, although they will still melt if it rains, or gets too far above freezing. They are best served in very cold weather. Perfect for winter in Wisconsin.



It's popular to use cookie cutters to make these ornaments, but I opted to use silicone molds. These come in a variety of shapes, usually with several good-sized cups for filling.

I decided to use snowflake and heart shapes. Since they are silicone, I didn't even bother with spraying or applying any non-stick cooking oil or spray.

TO MAKE THESE YOU WILL NEED:

2 silicone molds - I used **2 6-pc** molds

1 roll of twine for hanging, cut into **12** strips

A **dozen** paper straws or sticks to make the holes for string to go through.

2 pouches of unflavored gelatin

1 large bowl for mixing together

1 spatula

1 tablespoon

1 cookie sheet that will hold both silicone molds for refrigeration (in the freezer).

1 sheet of parchment paper

1 cookie cooling rack for drying/hardening

1/2-cup cold water

1/2-cup boiling hot water

3 cups of Wild bird seed mix - I used Wild & Strong** brand peanut mix, which includes peanuts, black oil sunflower, millet, sunflower pieces, and corn pieces. I also added in safflower seed.**



**You can use whatever brand you prefer, but be sure to include black oil sunflower seeds, and peanuts or peanut pieces, as they are enjoyed by most songbirds, and woodpeckers.



INSTRUCTIONS:

Heat about a cup of water to boiling in the microwave. I heated it for 3 minutes. You will use 1/2 cup of the boiled water.

To begin: Add 1/2-cup cold water to bowl.

Pour in both pouches of unflavored gelatin. Stir until gelatin is mostly dissolved.

Add 1/2-cup hot water, stir for 2-3 minutes until fully dissolved.



Pour in 1/2-cup cold water, two pouches of gelatin, stir.



Add in 1/2-cup hot water, stir for 2-3 minutes until fully dissolved.



Next pour all birdseed into the bowl and stir continuously until seeds are well coated, and you do not see any standing liquid in the bowl.

This should take 3-5 minutes.

If there is still liquid, add additional birdseed, maybe a 1/4-cup at a time and stir for another couple minutes until any standing liquid is gone.

Spoon the mix generously into the silicone molds, pressing with the back of the spoon to fill the entire space.

Once you have the molds full, use a paper straw to make a space for a hole. Placement of the straw should be far enough away from the edges so that the hole is surrounded by the seed mixture. Maybe a 1/2-inch or so.

Press the mixture snug around the straw with the back of the spoon.



Now place the filled molds onto the cookie sheet, for stability, and place in the freezer for about an hour to begin the hardening process. *After about an hour*, you can remove them, carefully, from the molds, and place them on a sheet of parchment paper.



At this point, they should be hard enough so that you can add the twine for hanging. Then, place each one on the cookie cooling rack as you go. They will need to sit on the open rack to fully dry and harden for a good 24 hours or so.



Drying is important, as it will keep the ornaments from developing any mold (which you cannot feed to the birds).



Once the ornaments have fully dried and hardened, you can hang them outside for the birds, or gift them as you wish. It's best to keep them in the freezer in order to keep them fresh until they will be gifted and/or used (again, to avoid molding). *Any moisture or humidity, or excessive heat should be avoided.*


I stored mine in the freezer in a sealed container with a sheet of wax paper in between layers. To gift, wrap in wax paper, or cellophane goody bags, and box securely to avoid breakage.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Don't be intimidated by the possibility of mold. I was, initially, but by making sure the ornaments were placed on an open rack and allowed to dry fully, I have avoided any mold.

They are nice and solid. And, they look delicious! I can't wait to witness the birds enjoying them.





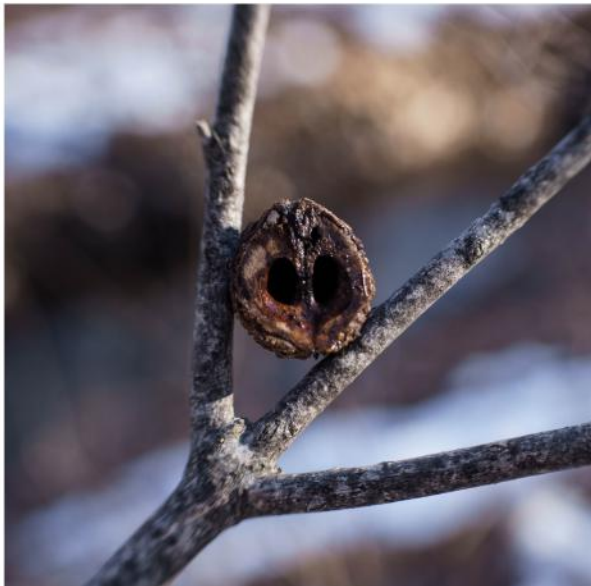
Let Nature Be Your Valentine

A Winter Photo Walk

One of my favorite things to spot when I'm out in nature is heart shapes. I've always been fond of Valentine's Day. Though it's historically been a romantic holiday, I've always enjoyed crafting valentines for friends and family alike. To me, the romantic aspect of the holiday is overhyped anyway. I'm always on the lookout for naturally occurring hearts, but I'm not averse to making my own with the materials at hand (sticks, stones, leaves, snow).

In addition, I enjoy taking heart shaped arts and craft pieces along, too. Crafted ornaments, homemade bird seed ornaments, gifted ornaments. A few years back I received a heart shaped mold for making snow hearts. I have had a great deal of fun making snow hearts and photographing them along the trail. Then leaving them for others to find. Anything unnatural goes back home with me. No littering. I promise.

This Valentine's Day, consider taking a walk in the park with someone whose company you enjoy, and look for heart shapes along the way. It's a perfect solo photo walk idea, too. Take your camera along and keep an eye out for nature's hearts, or bring along a heart or two of your own and create some heartfelt art.







Birding Local

Bird Watching In Your Local Parks & Your Own Backyard



The Park Next Door.com
 Celebrating **10** Years
 Adventure Goes Local



Written and photographed by Kimberly Mackowski

Frozen Beauty



Aurora Borealis in Wisconsin

A Sense Of Wonderment



ART FOR YOUR WALLS FROM THE PARK NEXT DOOR

If you're a Wisconsin nature fan, you can decorate your walls, phone case, home decor, or stationery with images from the parks, nature preserves, and trails of Wisconsin featured on The Park Next Door.

Fine Art America is the world's largest art marketplace and print-on-demand technology company.

They have been helping artists sell wall art, home decor, apparel, and other products since 2006, and are home to hundreds of thousands of artists, photographers, graphic designers, illustrators, and iconic brands.



Want to support local artists in your area? They have a search feature to do just that! You can visit my online shop to see the current offering of images and custom products.

You can find my shop at: <https://1-kimberly-mackowski.pixels.com/>

Simple Ways To Support The Park Next Door And It's Purpose

Sign up for the website newsletter. I generally send out one email per month. Occasionally, if there is something special to share, I may send another, or send it a little earlier than usual if content warrants it. I know how overwhelming a full inbox can be. [Sign up here.](#)

Feel free to **forward/share** the monthly emails with like-minded friends and nature enthusiasts. And remember, if you do subscribe, to open the emails. If they don't show as open, eventually the service suspends the email address.

Share your discoveries. If you've visited a local park or preserve that isn't yet on the website, let me know. I'd love the opportunity to check it out, and share it, too.

Share a favorite feature, blog, or location listing. If a specific feature page, blog, or location tickles your fancy, please share it with friends, or on your social media feed. Every little bit of exposure helps.

Follow The Park Next Door on Instagram for updates on everyday explorations and happenings. [@theparknextdoor](https://www.instagram.com/theparknextdoor)



Thank You for your support, and for your love of our parks and preserves.



There's Peace In Nature