

Leadens gray skies hover overhead, sinking ominously lower with each passing minute.

A damp mist hangs heavy in the air, unseen by the eye, but thick enough to feel on your face. Fingers of cold poke past your collar, around your ears, chilling your hands even through a pair of soft gloves.

Calves huddle toward the backs of their open-fronted hutches, snuggling down in thick, insulating beds of fresh straw and satisfied by bellies filled with bottles of warm milk. The heifer herd piles together beyond the gate, gathering warmth from one another, their backs toward the direction of the light, but biting breeze.

And at the back of the dairy barn, the "girls" wander down from the feed bunk, gazing in over the gate, silently announcing their willingness to return to the newly-sawdust-bedded stalls.

"Hey, we're waiting. What's the hold up?" their big, dark, long-lashed eyes seem to plead. Good heavens, they've been outside just an hour or so. But, it's that kind of a raw morning. And then it begins.

Sometimes it starts softly, fat, wife flakes casually wafting their way to the ground. A delicate-type snow, gentle, quiet, calling attention to its prettiness as it begins whitening the grass, the pine boughs, the tops of the split rail fence.

Other times, the gray clouds open overhead and the snow arrives with an "attitude."

It may begin as sleet, a rain of tiny ice balls, tick ... tick ... tick ... ticking against the windowpanes, announcing its intention to ruin the day of construction workers, highway crews, and schoolbus drivers whose schedules will be altered before the hour is up.

The ice balls sting against your bare face, following the cold air down the back of your neck and making you wish you'd donned a heavier hat and something with a wide collar. Remaining outside barn chores are finished as quickly as possible. The clutch of heifers huddles together even more tightly, then makes a beeline for the feeder when the gate finally swings open.

Another gate is swung for the cows to return to the dairy barn.

And you'd best get quickly out of the way, because they come with the closest thing to a stampede that our bunch of docile, normally plodding cows will ever attain in speed.

A white sheet is already covering the pavement of the road past the house and the neighbors on the hill are barely visible in the thickening haziness of the hissing ice balls transforming over to a steady, wind-blown snow.

Later in the season of winter, this beginning of a snowy day may set us to grumbling and dreaming of dandelions and daffodils. But, when such a morning comes just ahead of Christmas, it stirs a seasonal excitement in all but the most fervent anti-snow scrooges.

This is a day to wrap those gifts still languishing in their bags in the spare room upstairs. To finish addressing the last of the greeting cards still stacked on the kitchen counter.

Such a day taunts one to bake cookies, to concoct that special holiday candy, or to bake a batch of fresh, wonderfully-smelling homemade bread. To get some pine or cinnamon or bayberry-scented candles out on the tables, tuck a few pine boughs around their feet and light them when evening rolls around.

(Note: This is NOT a day to run to the supermarket, because the rest of the world will be making that snow! ... snow! ... it's the end of the world! ... emergency trip to stock up on milk and bread and other food necessities like tortilla chips and salsa.)

But, hey, it's the holiday season. Let it snow!

# Kids Learn About Holidays Around The World

DAYTON, Ohio — 'Tis the perfect season for school children to learn about different customs and holidays around the world.

And thanks to a 4-H in the Classroom program provided by the Montgomery County office of Ohio State University Extension, Dayton-area teachers have a ready, free resource that provides teaching materials on Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, and various traditions of these celebrations around the world.

4-H in the Classroom programs take science-based, hands-on 4-H projects and modify them for a classroom setting. Teachers in many parts of Ohio can "check out" kits from local Extension offices that provide all the necessary resource material, equipment, handouts and supplies. Holidays Around the World is a spin-off from these science-based programs available to teachers in Montgomery County.

"Teachers were asking for a program that covered all perspectives of the season," said Andrea Bowlin, the youth at risk specialist at the Montgomery County office. "It seemed to be a natural progression of the partnership started with other 4-H in the Classroom programs."

The Holidays Around the World kit isn't fancy. It moves from classroom to classroom in a green, 2-foot-by-1-foot Rubbermaid container. But inside are the

interactive tools teachers need to teach third through sixth graders about religious holidays and customs of the season.

There are templates to make a paper dreidel as students study Hanukkah, a kinara - a candleholder containing seven candles - that is the centerpiece of Kwanzaa celebrations, and a crown worn by people passing out Christmas gifts in Sweden. There's also a globe so students can identify the various countries around the world, Bowlin said.

"Any teacher could pull together the same materials I have," Bowlin said. "But teachers today are time- and resource-strapped. They asked for this program, and I think it's important to meet their needs."

The 2,000-plus Dayton-area students who are part of the 4-H in the Classroom school enrichment programs also have access to all of the 4-H activities, Bowlin said. Any student can go to 4-H camp, participate in the fair or join a youth group.

A variety of 4-H in the Classroom programs are offered in many counties throughout Ohio. The ones provided in Montgomery County include Rockets Away, a rocketry science program; Fishy Science; Chick Embryology; Insects; Holidays Around the World; and Manners. The latter two are only available in Montgomery County.



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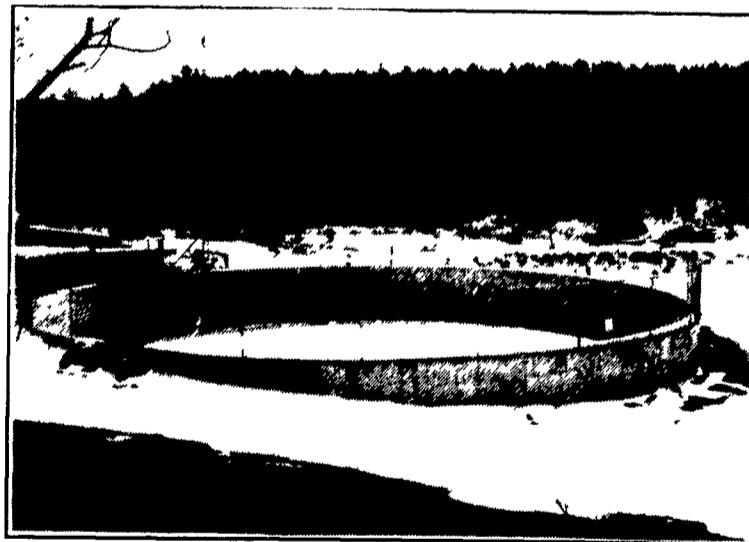
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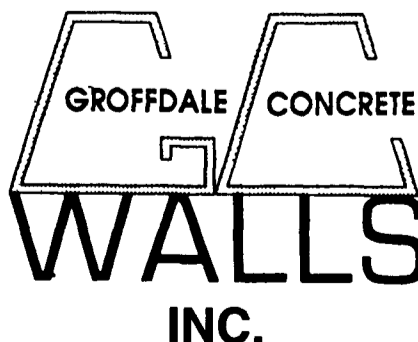


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