

There's a bright side to winter weather, I suppose

You can't appreciate the good weather unless you have bad weather.

I told my theory to someone recently and they said I was nuts because they had a friend who lived in Barbados and said they enjoyed the good weather all the time.

Oh... then my new theory is that I'm nuts.

But, I don't really consider bad weather bad because I like winter, so now I'm totally confused.

The only thing I don't like about winter is driving in snow or freezing rain, and the fact that it's much more difficult to jog in the cold. Mind you, I don't go jogging, but if I did, I wouldn't like the winter.

I even like the biting cold because it feels so good when you come in and warm yourself by the fire. Mind you, I don't have a fireplace, which makes that difficult but not impossible. I

barely even used mine when I had one, but it looks nice on television and in the movies.

Another thing the winter is great for is skiing, swooshing down the ski hill, the wind at your back.

Mind you, I've never been skiing, never mind swooshing, but it looks like fun, and I used to watch my kids do it.

Now snowmobiling, that's a different story. Mind you, I've never done that either, but I sat on a snowmobile once.

And how fun is ice fishing? Mind you, I wouldn't know because I've never done it. I haven't decided yet whether I think fishing is cruelty to animals or cruelty to me, but if I did like fishing I'd want to do it all year round.

How about snowshoeing? Mind you, I've never tried it, and don't see the attraction, but that's not something you can do in the summer,



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and there are people who seem to enjoy it.

Cross-country skiing? What fun. Mind you, I didn't think so in the five minutes that I tried it many years ago. It was a lot of work and I didn't see the point. All you're doing is going from one place to another for no particular reason until you're too tired to go on. But, hey, one person's fun is another person's misery.

There's hockey, of course, but nowadays that goes on in the summer, too. Even more so where the NHL is concerned.

To tell you the truth, now I'm wondering why I like winter. I guess the thing about winter is that it's warm and cozy, which is ironic considering how cold it is.

You can be warm in the summer, but never cozy.

And in the summer it's rare that you be happy about staying home. But, in the winter on a cold wintery night, there's nothing better than staying home.

The other thing is that when you get a warm sunny winter day you enjoy it that much more. Certainly more than a warm sunny summer day, which we just take for granted.

So, I believe I've proved my point. Mind you, I forget what that is.

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(NC)-The quintessential holiday icon, the gingerbread house has been re-invented using California Walnuts. The Walnut Shortbread House combines the traditional favorite of shortbread with the subtle nuttiness of California Walnuts. Get the kids to help build it and then enjoy it together.

Walnut Shortbread:

1 cup	butter, softened	250 mL
1/2 cup	superfine sugar	125 mL
1 tbs	vanilla	15 mL
2 cups	all-purpose flour	500 mL
1/8 tsp	salt	0.5 mL
1 cup	California Walnuts, chopped	250 mL

Icing:

1/2	cup water	125 mL
1/4 cup	meringue powder	50 mL
4-2/3 cups	icing sugar	1150 mL

Shortbread: In large bowl, beat butter and sugar until fluffy; stir in vanilla. Add flour, salt and walnuts; stir until blended. Pat dough into ball, wrap in plastic wrap and freeze 30 minutes or until firm. Once chilled, place dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper and roll to 1/2-inch (1-cm) thickness. Cut into desired shapes for house (each piece should be no larger than 6 inches x 8 inches [15 cm x 20 cm]). Visit www.walnutinfo.com to download and print the shortbread house templates. Gently remove from parchment paper and place on baking sheet. Pat excess dough into ball, wrap in plastic wrap and freeze for later use.

Bake shapes in centre of 300°F (150°C) oven 30 minutes or until firm and golden. Let cool completely before transferring gently to rack. Repeat with remaining house shapes.

Icing: In medium bowl, beat water and meringue powder 2 minutes or until foamy. Add icing sugar; beat 4 more minutes or until very stiff peaks form. Keep covered with damp towel to prevent drying. Makes 3 cups.

To assemble house: With pastry bag fit with desired tip, use icing to secure pieces of house together. Let sit at least 4 hours or until completely dry before decorating. Decorate with California Walnut halves as roof shingles, candies, pretzels and other goodies as desired.

Makes 1 house.

Nutty Idea: Mix another batch of dough following the Walnut Shortbread recipe to make walnut cookies or ornaments. Use an oversized cookie cutter and cut the dough to make festive tree ornaments. Don't forget to make a hole to tie a string through. Decorate the cookies with plump walnut halves prior to baking.

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