

# Park Pals

## Sleepy Heads

Some animals adapt to winter by hibernating.

When the weather gets chilly, they curl up in a cozy spot and go into such a deep sleep that they don't feel hungry or cold for months!



**Q.** What do body fat, fur, water, and mud have in common?

**A.** They all help insulate animals from the cold.

**A** layer of body fat or thick fur helps keep a critter warm from the inside out. Many animals and birds get ready for winter by eating as much as they can when there is plenty of food around during the summer and fall. Mammals grow thick fur coats in the fall and birds fluff up their feathers to trap their body heat. Some mammals develop patches of special brown fat near their brain, heart and lungs.

A layer of soil, or even a blanket of snow and ice, can protect critters from the frosty winter wind. Cold blooded turtles and amphibians, like salamanders and frogs, bury themselves in the mud in the bottom of a pond. The cold water holds lots of oxygen, which they can breathe through their skin. Snakes are also cold blooded, but they have a different strategy for winter warmth. They slither by the dozens into a hollow log or animal den, and spend the winter curled up together in a creepy snake ball.

**Q.** When is a black bear green?

**A.** When it hibernates.

**H**ibernating animals do all of the eco-friendly things that people do when they want to go green. First, the animals pile on the insulation, and then they lower the thermostat, so they use less fuel.



Can't wait for Spring? Make a hibernating

You will

- An empty paper towel or toilet paper tube
- Pom poms
- Google eyes
- Felt or construction paper (for ears & tail)

**Make a cave:**

Color the tube brown or gray. You can glue on some bark and fall leaves to resemble a log in the forest.

**Make a critter:**

Glue two pom poms together to make the body and head. You can make the arms and legs from small pom poms or circles of felt. Glue on the google eyes. Cut three half circles from the felt to make two ears and a tail.



**Q. What's so special about Groundhog's Day?**

**A. Before the groundhog pops up from its burrow, it performs an amazing feat!**

**T**he groundhog (also known as a woodchuck) is a true hibernator because it lowers its body temperature from a toasty 98 degrees (about the same as your temperature) to as low as 38 degrees (that's really cold – water freezes at 32 degrees). It also slows down its heart beat from 80 beats per minute to just 4 beats per minute! Every few weeks during the winter, the hibernating groundhog gets up for a quick potty break – and then goes right back to sleep.

Like the groundhog, a hibernating black bear slows its heart rate to a crawl, but the bear's body temperature drops just a little. The black bear doesn't eat or poop for months, though, and a mama black bear can sleep right through the birth of her cubs in late winter!



**What about the birds?**

**M**any birds migrate – that is, they fly south to spend the winter in a warmer climate. Some birds stick around all year, like cardinals, chickadees, titmice, and woodpeckers. You can show you care by filling a songbird feeder with sunflower seeds, hanging up a suet cake, and keeping a dish of clean water for drinking and bathing.



**Q. Where do other furry critters go when it snows?**

**A. Look up, down, and all around!**

**S**ome mammals cuddle up in a den and sleep for days during cold snaps, but they wake up easily on a mild day to grab a snack and some fresh air. Squirrels stay cozy in their nest high in a tree, while bigger critters like skunks, opossums, and raccoons hide out in a den or hollow log.

### Why hibernate?

Fill in the blanks to show what you have learned.

1. Winter is coming, and it's almost time for the groundhog to
2. First, he eats non-stop to put on body fat for
3. Soon, his body will adapt with a 60-degree drop in body
4. When the snow falls, he will stay warm and snug curled up in his
5. Shhh...now the groundhog is
6. Rest well, Mr. Groundhog, so you can wake up for Ground Hog

Now, read the letters in the boxes, from 1. to 6.

Animals hibernate to save

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

**pal to help you "bear" the wait!**

**need:**

- Markers or crayons
- Glue
- Fall leaves, strips of bark, pine needles, or twigs
- Glitter

Place the critter in the cave.



Draw a picture or write a poem about winter on a piece of paper, fold it, and place the picture in the cave with the critter. You can sprinkle glitter on the cave to represent snow.

Put the cave and critter in a quiet place, where it can rest until spring.

