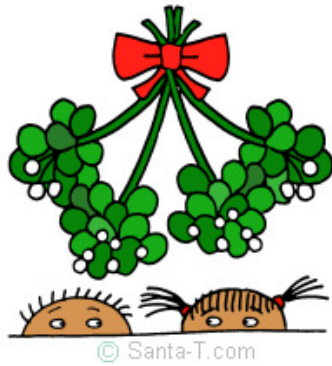


Santa's Winter Science Page








Mistletoe Facts

Mistletoe isn't just a decoration to inspire kisses. It is a real plant that gives food, shelter, and nesting places for many birds, butterflies, and mammals. Mistletoe grows on the branches of trees and shrubs. In fact, the American mistletoe's scientific name, *Phoradendron*, means "thief of the tree" in Greek. When its seed lands on a tree, the mistletoe sends out roots into the tree that steal some of the tree's nutrients. It doesn't kill the tree, though. The mistletoe's berries are food for many birds, such as doves, bluebirds, and robins.

Snowflake Facts

You probably already know that no two snowflakes are alike. But did you know that scientists think there are five different shapes of snow crystals? What shape a snowflake is depends on what the temperature was when the snowflake was formed. The five shapes, in order from the coldest to the warmest, are:

-  dendrites, which are branching, tree-like figures
-  six-pointed stars
-  hollow columns shaped like a six-sided prism
-  long, needle shapes
-  thin and flat six-sided plates

Temperature also determines the size of snowflakes. The colder it is outside, the smaller the snowflakes. Most snowflakes are less than one-half inch across. The largest snowflake ever recorded was 15 inches across.

Important Winter Weather Terms:

Frost/Freeze Warning: Below freezing temperatures may be coming soon.

Winter Weather Advisory: Cold temperatures, frost and/or snow are expected soon.

Winter Storm Watch: A big winter storm could develop in your area sometime soon.

Winter Storm Warning: A strong winter storm has started or will start very soon.

Blizzard Warning: Lots of snow with strong winds. The very cold temperatures and blowing snow can make it dangerous to be outside.

Snow Flurries: Light snow falling off and on. The snow probably will not stay on the ground.

Snow Showers: Light to heavy snow falling off and on. Some build up of snow on the ground is possible.

Freezing rain: Rain that freezes when it hits the ground. Freezing rain can coat streets and sidewalks with slippery ice.

Sleet: Rain that freezes in to small ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet can also coat streets and sidewalks with ice making them slippery.



North Pole Weather

Polar Day and Polar Night

At the North Pole the sun starts rising around March 21 and doesn't start setting until around September 21. This very long cycle of day and night in the arctic is caused by the tilt of the earth's axis as the earth orbits the sun.

The Polar Night is when it is dark 24 hours a day. This happens every winter when the sun does not rise above the horizon. During the summer the opposite happens, the sun stays above the horizon 24 hours a day. This is called the Polar Day. Sometimes it is called the Midnight Sun.