

SUMMER SOLSTICE

Thursday is the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year, and the beginning of summer. Traditionally, the Summer Solstice has been a time of fertility and magic. Since most of the people reading this article already have children, we'll skip the fertility part.

There are many ways to celebrate the Summer Solstice with your family. For a fun family affair that includes pre-teens, teens and adults, plan on paying homage to Shakespeare and his play "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Make sure you have enough copies for everyone, or at least one for every two people. Take a blanket to the beach, a picnic and your dreams of being a star. Either assign parts or take turns reading. Even children who cannot read can get into the fun. You might have to draw straws to see who gets to play Puck!

For younger children you can craft a fairy shelter in your yard. First, find a box – any size will do, but the smaller the better. Shoeboxes are the perfect size. Cut one of the small ends of the box so it is hinged at the top. Have your child decorate the box by gluing sticks, grass and flowers from around your yard onto the outside. After the box is camouflaged, add some ribbons of varying colors. You can also make shiny "fairy jewels" by drawing shapes on aluminum foil, coloring them with markers, and cutting them out. These can be glued onto the box as well.

When the fairy shelter is completed, leave it outside near the edge of your yard, away from activity if possible. Put some milk or honey into a small bottle cap and leave it in the shelter. Children love to check on their fairy shelter the next morning to find it turned over from the fairy party the night before. Some children are even fortunate enough to find a thank-you from the fairies in the shelter: a small shell, a beautiful rock, or a previously lost trinket from the house.

There are several books you can share with your child to keep the fairy lore going all summer. "Fairyopolis: A Flower Fairy Journal" by Cicely Mary Barker, is a scrapbook cornucopia of fairy delight. Illustrated with beautiful watercolors and hidden treasures, this book will be a favorite for both you and your child.

If you want to make your own story time with your child, brush up on your fairytales. There are

several good collections available at Mitchell's Book Corner. "The Kingfisher Book of Fairytales" is bursting with tales of mischievous fairies, kind pixies, and beautiful enchantresses. Tweak your favorite story by setting it on Nantucket and adding a little local folklore. This is an activity that can be repeated every year, with new tales each summer solstice. You can bet your children will one day be

repeating these stories to their own children.

To take the fairy theme further, and in case the weather does not cooperate for outdoor activities, fashion fairy garb for you and your child. Tulle is a wonderful fabric that comes in various colors, and does not need to be sewn after it is cut. That makes clothes construction easy, especially for people like me whose sewing skills stop at lost button repairs.

Gather fresh flowers from the yard to fashion a fairy necklace. Fishing line or thin wire is needed for this craft. Attach the line or wire to the flowers by wrapping it around the stems close to the bloom. Once you have a complete necklace, cut the line or wire and tie it together around your child's neck. Dandelions work well for this project, and most children don't realize they are really weeds. It's one of those win/win activities: the yard gets weeded and the kids get a necklace!

While boys may not want a tulle skirt and ribbons, remember that Puck, the knavish woodland sprite in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," is male. Less frilly fairy clothes can be fashioned out of green or brown cloth with leaves or sticks added.

Another important part of fairy garb is a headdress. Using ribbons, braid a headband the size of your child's head, making sure to leave enough surplus for trailing down the back. Insert fresh flowers into a few of the braided parts. If you have any old costume jewelry you can also add jewels. For a more nature-inspired headdress, find some vines to braid together. Small green branches also work well. You will need to make sure to remove any sharp edges that could poke your child.

Celebrating the magic of the Summer Solstice with your child is a wonderful way to welcome summer to the island. It is a nice memory to return to when you are fuming in snarled traffic, trying to find a parking space in town or looking for a bare spot to lay your towel down at the beach. Summer is what we make of it — and magic begins with each of us. ■



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