The Hygge Issue

SEASONAL COMFORTS
The art & science of cozy living all year long

EMBRACING LATE WINTER
Homespun Seasonal Living’s Kathie Lapcevic teaches us how to make the most of the remaining dark days

Natural Light
Create that cozy glow with candles made from all-natural ingredients

Cinnamon Rolls
The Ultimate Comfort Food

29 Days of Hygge
Ways to add more cozy comfort to your life every day this month
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February is a funny time of year. It's still technically winter, but by February, most of us in the northern hemisphere are already sick of the snow, the rain, the cold and the dark days, and ready for the return of spring.

February can actually be a rather depressing month the farther north you are from the equator, due to the fact that it gets darker and colder the farther north you go. Add to this, there are no bright, merry holidays in February, except perhaps Valentine’s Day and the occasional birthday, and that really depends on how you choose to celebrate.

But in general, February is a rather bleak month here in the north, and after having endured a few months of winter already, it can be all too easy to start succumbing to feelings of boredom, loneliness and even depression if we’re not careful.

Luckily, there’s a way to combat these feelings by actually embracing the dark days of late winter, and by practicing a little something called Hygge this time of year.

Hygge (pronounced “hue-gah”) is a Danish word that describes an overall feeling of comfort, coziness, warmth and wellbeing. It usually involves layering up in sweaters and blankets and either cozying up with a book, a scented candle and a cup of tea, or enjoying laughter and conversation with loved ones while eating comfort food, drinking rich, full-bodied drinks and making merry around the hearth.

For this reason, Hygge is often associated with the warmth and coziness of the holiday season. But Hygge is a lifestyle concept that can be applied at any time of year, even in the summer!

However it does tend to lend itself particularly well to the winter season, which is why it’s such a popular way of life in Denmark and other nordic countries that experience long, dark winters.

**hygge**

[hue-gah] noun

A feeling of warmth, comfort and coziness, often enjoyed intimately with loved ones, good food and drinks, warm blankets and candlelight.
February is an especially appropriate time to focus on adding more Hygge to your life since it’s the perfect time of year to get cozy and enjoy the slower pace and warm, indoor comforts associated with the winter months.

But Hygge is also about getting outdoors and embracing each season in all its glory. It’s about bundling up and making yourself a warm drink to take on a brisk winter walk or heading up to the mountain to partake in your favourite winter sport with your loved ones.

And, of course, about coming inside to warm your toes by the fireside afterward:) Indeed, there’s probably no better time than winter to practice the art of living the Hygge lifestyle. But the concept of Hygge can be applied at any time of year. And while most things we associated with Hygge also tend to be associated with summer, we can practice Hygge in slightly different ways in different seasons and at different times of year.

This is because the concept of Hygge-style living is both an art and a science. The art is in how people practice Hygge, and can manifest itself in any number of ways, including (but not limited to) all of the ways listed above.

But the science behind Hygge suggests that by creating a feeling of warmth and coziness, and a sense of intimate connection with friends and family, we can find joy in the every day and improve our overall happiness and outlook at any time of year.

Of course, it makes more sense to practice Hygge in your life in the winter when people tend to feel more melancholy due to the weather. But you can bring more Hygge into your life at any time of year and reap the mental health and wellness benefits.

For starters, it’s not hard to see how one could bring more cozy comfort into their life in the autumn when the first leaves fall and there’s a crisp, chill in the air. While it’s not as dark and gloomy a season as winter, autumn is the season of sweaters and bonfires and warm apple cider and hayrides and pumpkin pie shared with loved ones… All very much in line with Hygge-style living.

But there’s a place for Hygge in the spring and summer too. In the spring, you could add more coziness by bringing the outdoors in and adding fresh flowers to all corners of your home, by lighting candles in the evening with dinner and by celebrating the return to warmer weather by opening up the windows for fresh air and swapping your winter flannels out for fresh, clean white linens.

In the summer you can add Hygge to your outdoor living space with lanterns and fairy lights and fire bowls and other soft-glowing lights scattered around your yard or sitting area.

Keep light blankets handy so you can cover your legs at night while sitting out on the patio front porch. Swap hot tea for a cold cocktail and enjoy a
background of uplifting, feel-good music while you while away the long summer nights enjoying the company of good friends beneath the starlit sky.

Okay, now I’m starting to really miss summer…

Which is exactly why adding a little Hygge to life in the dark, cold winter months is so very important to keep our spirits bright while we wait for longer, warmer days to arrive!

This issue of Modern Homesteading Magazine is all about how to do just that: embracing the dark days of late winter in all their glory by applying the concept of Hygge-style living to your home and life.

First up, we’re talking all things candles in our feature article, Natural Light.

Since the warm, cozy glow of soft candlelight is so integral to Hygge, we’re covering everything you need to know about choosing safe, healthy, non-toxic candles for your home. Because toxic fumes just do not vibe well with Hygge!

Next, we’ve got all your cozy needs covered with our Creature Comforts guide to all things Hygge… modern homesteader-style!

Our guest this month is Kathie Lapcevic, creator of the popular Homespun Seasonal Living blog.

Through her blog, Kathie shares tips and tricks -including recipes, crafts, gardening ideas and DIY projects- for living a slow, seasonal lifestyle that is intentional and joyful and focused on living in tune with the natural rhythm of the earth. And she’s here this month sharing some of her best tips for seasonal living in late winter, and how you can use Hygge to bring a little more light and a lot more happiness and joy to the dark, cold days that are still to come before we begin the transition to spring.

Our from-scratch recipe of the month is a simple, homemade version of the ultimate February comfort food: Cinnamon rolls baked in cast iron and topped with vanilla cream cheese frosting *drool.*

Once you make them yourself and realize how easy they are, you’ll never spend money on day-old cinnamon rolls from the mall again!

Then, create an extra cozy atmosphere with three warm and cozy essential oil diffuser blends that will instantly add a little Hygge to your home!

And finally, don’t forget your free printable 29-day Hygge advent calendar (in honour of leap year!) full of activities and suggestions to help you bring more Hygge into your life the February and make the most of the season!

So make yourself a cup of something hot, light a candle, cover up with a warm blanket and enjoy this issue of Modern Homesteading Magazine!

Wishing you homemade, homegrown, homestead happiness (and all the comfort and joy of the winter season :)

Anna
Humans have been using candles since the beginning of civilized time.

Thousands of years ago, animal fats, beeswax and even waxes made from plants and insects were used to make the very first candles in ancient civilizations spanning from Egypt to Asia.

Candles went mostly unchanged for centuries upon centuries, and remained the primary light source for human beings all the way through the late 19th century when man discovered how to harness the powers of electricity.

During the mid 1800s, chemists also discovered paraffin wax: a byproduct of petroleum that was both odourless and white in colour. From this point forward, candles were by and large made from a mixture of paraffin wax and stearic acid (an animal byproduct that is extracted from fat).

Many candles are still made from paraffin wax today, but recent studies have found that there are toxic chemicals in paraffin wax that can be quite harmful when burned in the home.

Likewise, many of the dyes and fragrances that were added to candles in the 20th century when they became sought-after decorative items have been shown to release toxic carcinogens into the air when burned.

Luckily, a recent spike in interest in healthier, more natural products has led to the development of more natural candles as well. Soy wax was developed in the late 20th century and has become a popular choice for candle wax due to being an all-natural, clean-burning, plant-based white wax with no known health risks.

Beeswax candles have also regained popularity in recent times, and synthetic fragrances are slowly being replaced by essential oils to add fragrance to candles.

While the market is still saturated with candles that are full of toxins, people are becoming more knowledgeable about the dangers lurking beneath that soft, warm candlelit glow, and are in search of safer alternatives.

So, how exactly do you tell a good candle from a bad one?
How can you tell a good candle?

For starters, **check labels for ingredients.**

While candle manufacturers are not required to list all of the ingredients in their candles, typically candlemakers who make high quality, all-natural candles are eager to let people know since it’s a selling point, so usually the label will say something like “soy candle made with 100% pure essential oils.”

Usually if there’s no mention of soy wax and it’s obviously not beeswax, then it’s most likely paraffin wax.

Now, keep in mind that just because it says 100% pure essential oils doesn’t mean there’s no fragrance oil in the candle. It just means that the essential oils that were used are 100% pure.

However, in my personal opinion, I don’t mind a little bit of fragrance oil because I enjoy the smell of scented candles, and that smell is pretty much impossible to attain with essential oils because their scent doesn’t “throw” well. So I’m okay with burning the odd candle with a mix of essential oils and fragrance oils.

You can decide for yourself, but in general you’re going to find that most soy wax candles on the market are scented with a combination of essential oils and fragrance oils.

Another surefire way to make sure your candle is 100% safe and natural is to **opt for beeswax.**

Beeswax candles are about as old-school and all-natural as they come, so they’re another great option. But there are downsides to beeswax too, depending on what you’re looking for in a candle.

Beeswax, for one, can be very expensive (even when buying the wax to make your own). Also, beeswax has a distinct scent and colour of its own, and while I personally really like the smell of beeswax, if you’re looking for high quality scented candles, you’re probably going to find a lot more scented soy candles than scented beeswax candles.

Plus, if you’re vegan and don’t use any animal byproducts, beeswax might not be a product you care to use, in which case soy wax is your best option.

How can you tell a bad candle?

**RULE NUMBER 1: DO NOT BUY CANDLES FROM THE DOLLAR STORE**

I know, I know… They’re so much cheaper than those fancy soy candles. But there’s a reason for that.

Most, if not all cheap candles from dollar stores across North America are made with paraffin wax, and many are obviously dies with synthetic dyes.

There’s a reason why that soy candle with essential oils is $15 while the same size candle from the dollar store only costs a dollar!

Let’s just say you get what you pay for, and if you can’t afford the good stuff, at least **don’t settle for the bad stuff!**
RULE NUMBER 2: AVOID TEA LIGHTS & VOTIVE CANDLES.

By and large these are made with paraffin wax and emit toxins when burned. If you want tea lights, pay a little extra and get soy or beeswax ones. Once again, there’s a reason why that pack of 100 tea lights is only $5.00, and it’s not good.

RULE NUMBER 3: SKIP ANY CANDLES THAT ARE DYED

Sure, dyed candles can look pretty or match the paint colour in one of your rooms, but the toxins from synthetic dyes are just as bad as paraffin wax.

In fact, when I started making my own candles a few years ago, I decided to try adding dye to a batch at one point before I knew how bad the dyes were for you.

Whenever I’d burn one of my dyed candles, the jar that the candle was is would turn black with soot, and so would the wall nearby. It was at this point that I realized how bad dyes are for us, because if the wall was black with soot, I could only imagine what burning these dyes was doing to our lungs!

But I can’t afford those fancy, all-natural candles!

I know what it’s like to be on a budget that boutique soy candles just don’t fit into. And that’s exactly why a few years ago I began making my own soy wax candles at home!

To learn how to make your own soy candles at home for a fraction of the price they cost in stores, check out this tutorial.

Finally, if it’s the scent you’re after, I recommend diffusing a few drops of essential oils to get that cozy, Hygge vibe going. We’ve got three warm and comforting diffuser blend recipes on the second-to-last page of this magazine to help get you started!
Creature Comforts

10 cozy luxuries to help you get your Hygge on this winter... modern homesteader style!


The above listed products are available from lehmans.com.
If there were such a thing as a “seasonal living expert,” the title would have to go to Kathie Lapcevic.

Kathie is the writer and creator behind the popular blog, Homespun Seasonal Living, and is dedicated to inspiring naturally simple, seasonal, handmade living amongst her readers and online community.

When I started exploring ways to embrace winter and live seasonally, even in February, I naturally thought of Kathie’s wisdom and expertise in seasonal living, so I reached out to ask her a few questions about how to make the most of this time of year!

So Kathie, how do you recommend we go about embracing the late winter season? What sort of things can we do to enjoy what February has to offer?

The first thing is to always get outside.

It doesn’t have to be hours and it certainly doesn’t need to happen in the middle of a blizzard. But get outside.

Find a way to see the beauty the natural world has to offer in your particular corner of the world.

There’s this idea that February is dark and dreary and yes it might be very grey in some places, but the sunlight has actually been increasing since late December so there are definitely more daylight hours (in the northern hemisphere, anyway) in February than there are in November. Find a way to get outside and enjoy them.

Go for a walk around the neighbourhood. Go skiing or snowshoeing. Find a frozen pond and go ice skating.
Then go back inside to warm up under cozy blankets with your favourite hot drinks and a good book or hobby project!

I've heard you talk before about the Danish concept of Hygge before. Can you tell me more about Hygge? What's the definition and how did it come about?

Hygge is essentially the feeling of coziness and contentment, most often in the winter but can easily be applied to other seasons.

It's a Danish concept and I imagine they've been practicing it forever but has only recently become trendy or practiced in the United States.

What sort of things would you recommend keeping on hand to set yourself up for a cozy, enjoyable February?

Warm clothes - hats, gloves, scarves, winter jackets, snow boots or rain boots should be at the ready. This way when the sun shines or the temperatures feel good enough to get outside it's easy to accomplish.

Let nothing stand in the way of a quick opportunity to get outdoors!

Inside, be sure to have a well stocked pantry for warm drinks - tea, cocoa, coffee, etc. As well as favourite comfort foods.
Have the chocolate chips for cookie baking. Make sure there is rice for a pot of chicken and rice soup.

Obviously, adjust for your own favourites but be ready for comfort food-making.

Have candles on hand for a nice cozy candlelit dinner or breakfast. Play games by the same candlelight with the family.

Keep yourself well stocked with reading materials, use the library to keep it frugal. Have hobby and craft supplies ready so that you can use cold days and evenings indoors in a way that makes you feel good.

What types of activities would you recommend for this time of year for people looking to enjoy the season and keep spirits bright?

It should absolutely be something the person enjoys. There’s no point in going to the pond to ice skate if you dislike ice skating.

Getting outside is a great way to just disconnect from the pressures of the world and understanding nature in every season. This can be a simple walk around the block or in a local park it doesn’t have to be downhill skiing or snowshoeing (though certainly can be).

Dress appropriately for the weather and soak up the sunlight!

Many folks fall into a kind of hibernation habit. And while I completely understand that, it can disconnect us from loved ones. Find time to have folks over for hot cocoa, go for a walk with friends, host a soup exchange.

Do the slow activities that other times of the year make more difficult.

Bake the bread that takes a long time. Cook the slow soups, roasts, and casseroles - let the oven heat the house.

Late winter can be a particularly hard time for people living with depression and/or Seasonal Affective Disorder. Do you think that “Hygge” can help alleviate some symptoms of depression at this time of year?

And is there anything else you would recommend to people who find this time of year particularly dark and depressing?

I do think Hygge can help with mild cases of winter blues, however Seasonal Affective Disorder is a serious emotional and mental disorder that needs professional
help in many cases. That shouldn’t be overlooked or dismissed.

There are special lights that can be purchased that mimic natural sunlight in a way that many people find useful. Buy these and see if they can help.

Definitely find things that bring you joy to fight those feelings of darkness and depression. And if at all possible find ways to celebrate the things that you might not actually love about February.

Get outside and find the natural beauty to celebrate rather than curse the bare branches or rain clouds.

You have lots of resources on your blog to help people learn to celebrate and embrace each season of the year. Are there any particular resources that you can share to help people learn to embrace this time of year?

I’m a big believer (obviously) in the healing power of nature and I think it’s important to occasionally bring bits of nature inside our homes.

In winter, that can feel tougher to do since there are no flowers blooming in many places for example, however it’s not impossible. It’s also a great excuse to get outside for a bit and then come back inside to celebrate the earth’s bounty. You can learn more about how to bring nature inside this winter here.

Winter is also a great time to find the rest that our bodies need. So often our modern culture tells us to run all the time, but you can buck that trend and get caught up on the rest you so badly need with these tips.

If you’re having trouble getting motivated to get outdoors this winter, you can read some of my tips for getting outside in winter here.

Where else can people find you and learn more?

You can follow me on Instagram for a glimpse into how I live simply and seasonally in real life.

You can also follow me on Facebook and Pinterest to stay in the loop about new posts, tips and tricks to help you live a homespun, seasonal life, or join my Facebook group, The Fiercely DIY Collective for more simple, seasonal, handmade living in a fun, supportive group environment.

If you’re looking to take the next step toward simpler, more seasonal living, have a Free Seasonal Living eCourse that you can sign up for right here.

I also have a seasonal living journal / planner here for anyone looking to practice being more present and/or to live each day with more intention.

Kathie Lapcevic is a writer, teacher and homesteader who lives in northwest Montana with the love of her life, Jeff, and their two cats, a beehive, and a composting worm bin.

Kathie says:

“We’re dedicated to living a life made of our own hands and one that is intrinsically connected to the natural rhythms of the earth.”
Is there any food more quintessentially comforting in February than freshly-baked, hot out of the oven, melt-in-your-mouth, homemade cinnamon rolls?

How about freshly-baked, hot out of the oven, melt-in-your-mouth, homemade cinnamon rolls baked in cast iron and slathered in vanilla cream cheese frosting?

Um, yes please!

These rolls not only taste delicious, they’re also so easy to whip up at home that you’ll never again need to succumb to the urge to drive all the way to the mall just to pay top dollar for the slightly stale cinnamon rolls that are kept behind sneeze glass for hours on end until a lucky buyer comes along!

Plus, there’s just nothing like scraping freshly caramelized bits of cinnamon sugar off of a cast iron pan, or licking cream cheese frosting off the beaters when you’re done whipping it up from scratch. (And just try asking the bakers at the mall to lick their kitchen utensils… The answer, I assure you, is a strong and resounding “no.”)

Well guess what… You can do all of the above without judgment in the comfort of your own home when you set aside a little bit of time to make these from scratch. And trust me, it will be well worth the time it takes in the end:)
INGREDIENTS

For the Bread

1 cup milk or cream
2 ¼ tsp. active dry yeast
½ cup softened butter
½ cup sugar
1 egg
1 tsp. salt
3 ½ cups all-purpose flour

For the Filling

½ cup brown sugar
1 ½ Tbsp. ground cinnamon
¼ cup softened butter

For the Frosting

4 oz plain cream cheese
¼ cup softened butter
¾ cup icing sugar
1 tsp. vanilla paste or vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small saucepan over medium low heat (or in the microwave), warm the milk or cream up until it’s just a tad over lukewarm. Between 100-110ºF is good. Then pour warm milk into a mixing bowl and add the active dry yeast. Gently stir the yeast into the milk and allow it to sit and proof for about 10 minutes.

2. Add softened butter, sugar, egg and salt and mix well to combine. Add flour and mix together until all ingredients are beginning to stick together and form a dough ball. Then knead bread by hand or with a stand mixer for about 5 to 7 minutes until the dough is no longer sticky and forms a nice, firm ball. (You may need to add a little more flour as you go.

3. Once dough has formed a ball, keep it or place it back in the mixing bowl, cover with a kitchen towel and place it somewhere warm to rise for roughly one to two hours or so. I like to put mine in the oven with the light on for warmth in the winter months. While the dough is rising, mix the ingredients for the filling together in a bowl and set aside.

4. Once dough has roughly doubled in size, turn dough out onto a floured surface and form into a rough rectangle with your hands.

5. Spread the filling in a thin, even layer all over the surface of the dough, leaving only about ¼ inch margin around the edges. Then, tightly roll the dough lengthwise with your hands, with the seam-side ending up on the bottom.

6. Cut the roll into roughly 2-inch pieces, using either a sharp knife or some dental floss. (I like using dental floss to “tie” around the roll and cut it into sections without squishing the dough).

7. Place cinnamon rolls in a greased 12-inch cast iron pan, leaving a little bit of space between each roll to allow room for them to rise and expand. (You can also use a baking dish if you don’t have a cast iron pan).

8. Allow rolls to rise for another hour, then preheat the oven to 350ºF and bake for approximately 25 minutes. In the meantime, whip your frosting ingredients together and set aside.

9. Allow rolls to cool for 5 to 10 minutes before covering them in frosting.
Diffuser Blends of the Month

Diffuser Blends to Create a Warm & Cozy Atmosphere

Warm oils like cinnamon, cardamom, orange, patchouli and vanilla combine to create scent combinations that will help you turn your home into a cozy Hygge sanctuary.

Cinnamon Roll Blend

- 4 drops cinnamon
- 4 drops cardamom
- 4 drops vanilla

Cozy Cabin Blend

- 4 drops cinnamon
- 4 drops vanilla
- 4 drops orange

Sweater Weather Blend

- 4 drops cinnamon
- 4 drops cardamom
- 4 drops cedarwood

* This post contains affiliate links. For more information, please read The House & Homestead’s Affiliate Disclosure.

Every month we feature essential oil diffuser blends to complement the theme of the current issue.

All oils have been personally tested and approved (by me!), and by the experts at Plant Therapy too!

Shop Plant Therapy for great deals on Essential Oils and Diffusers!
| **Read a book**  
(Yes…an actual, paperback book). | **Make a cup (or pot) of your favourite hot beverage.** | **Turn off all the lights and light every candle in your house instead.** | **Soak in the bath by candlelight. Add bath salts or bubble bath (& maybe some wine?) for added effect.** |
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<td>Host a casual “seasonal celebration” for neighbours and close friends. Put out a platter of seasonal foods, put on a seasonal playlist and invite people to BYOB.</td>
<td>Eat dinner at the table with your family and make a “no phones at the table” rule.</td>
<td>Go for a nature walk. Choose a favourite park, beach or trail or go explore somewhere new!</td>
<td>Choose a special treat or baked good to make and get busy in the kitchen!</td>
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| **Diffuse one of the essential oil blends suggested in this magazine.** | **Have dinner by candlelight.**  
Play your favourite dinner music in the background. | **Choose a favourite craft to work on or try something new!** | Go for a walk around town. Grab a coffee and a treat from a local bakery and window shop at small boutique stores for fun! |
| Make a meal with someone you love. Cooking is always more fun when you do it with someone special! | Make your own candles.  
Here’s a tutorial to teach you how! | Make a slow-cooker meal that takes all day. Go outside to work or play and come in to a hot, homemade dinner that’s ready to serve! | If you have access to a fire pit, fire place or wood-burning stove, roast some marshmallows and make s’mores! |
| Cozy up your space by adding baskets full of blankets and books and candles to every room. | Go for a walk and collect moss, boughs, pine cones and rocks to decorate or make a terrarium with. | Go on a social media and/or technology detox and don’t look at a screen for at least 24 to 48 hours! | Plan a proper movie (or Netflix binge) night at home. Put out bowl of popcorn and treats and snuggle up under the blankets to watch! |
| **Add some fresh flowers or other living plants to your indoor space.** | Have a family games night! Try to stick to cards and board games and other games that don’t involve technology. | Play your favourite calming music while you tidy (and cozy) up your space! Classical music, jazz, folk and acoustic are all good options. | Bundle up and head to your local library to choose one or more new books to read! |
| **Tidy up your living space and declutter. It can feel SO GOOD to clear space in your home!** | Spend some valuable cuddle time with your pets. Cats and dogs are especially good candidates, although farm animals make close seconds! | Go for a drive in the country. Make yourself a hot beverage and head out for a “Sunday” drive somewhere slow and rural. | Go out and play! Choose a favourite winter activity like ice skating, skiing, tobogganing, or even just hiking or playing in the snow! |

**Leap Year BONUS:**
Write Valentine’s Day cards to your family and friends!