

Weather Old Wives Tales

There are so many predictions of weather, so many old wives tales. I thought I had heard them all, but then I heard some new ones. Let us take a look at some of those.

Rain is on the way because cows are lying down. In that case, it must rain every day at my house! There is no scientific evidence that this is true.

My elbow is hurting, so it is going to get cold! While it is true that colder weather can trigger joint pain, what is not true is the tale that the pain will be long lasting or that it will lead to a lifetime of joint problems. We do know the weather can affect our health. A Swiss study found an increase in heart attack risk in winter and a decrease in summer. This is because systolic blood pressure levels tend to be lower in the summer. Cold, dry air sucks moisture out of the skin, which makes the skin more vulnerable to things like psoriasis. Rainy days can make arthritis flare, due to atmospheric drops. Some suggest people have more migraine headaches when it is lightning, perhaps due to electromagnetic changes.

There are those that think the wooliness of a caterpillar can predict the severity of winter weather. There is no scientific evidence that this is the case. Then there are those that think the wider the middle brown section on the “wooly worm” the milder the winter. The curator of insects at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, during the 1940’s and 50’s conducted a survey for 10 years. He found this to be 80% accurate. Of course, there is criticism over the size of his sampling.

Persimmon prediction. According to folklore, believed to originate in the Ozarks, you can predict the coming winter weather by slicing a persimmon seed in half. If you see a spoon shape, there will be a lot of heavy wet snow to scoop. A fork shape means light, powdery snow and a milder winter. If you see a knife, you can expect to be “cut” by cold, icy, windy weather. The Jefferson County, Missouri, Extension office has studied this method for the past 17 year, checking the seeds and then the winter weather. The seeds have been accurate 13 out of 17 years.

Red sky at morning, sailor’s take warning: Red sky at nights, sailor’s delight. Dating back 2000 years, this tale was used to detect storm systems. This old wives tale is more widely trusted than most because it is uncannily accurate. This one actually has some scientific explanation. It relates to moving high and low surface-pressure weather systems and the way colors in sunlight are scattered differently by dirty and clean atmospheres.

The next one is squirrely, because you have to watch what the little city rats are

doing. If they are building their nests low in the trees, this would indicate a bad, cold and blistering winter. This one sounds a little “nutty”.

Another one, that is new to me, if you hear thunder or see lightning in the winter, snow will fall in a week. Thunder during the winter, does imply a strong/active weather pattern. This tale seems to be hit or miss. You could get snow or rain or nothing! I am voting for nothing.