

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas here at the Meadows house. The tree is decorated, the gifts are ready, the baking and cooking continues, plus we've got plenty of snow on the ground!

Our son Billy, wife Robin and the kids got here first - they'll be staying through Christmas day. Then Tom and his girlfriend Christine arrived from New York. They spent Thanksgiving with her family, so they've come to spend Christmas with us here in Summerdale. The girls both stopped by with their families today too, so our house was bulging at the seams!

You know, it's nice to have the grandkids around. When we get to be grown ups, we sometimes lose a bit of that Christmas magic. But kids have a knack for helping us rediscover it - their excitement is as contagious as their giggles!

Speaking of giggles, there's a lot of that going on in the kitchen right now. Sarah is baking sugar cookies for the kids to decorate, and I can just imagine what the end result is going to be! I'll probably get recruited for helping to clean up. She's also got some gingerbread cooling - now there's a Christmas smell for you! We've been snacking all day on cheese and crackers, sausage, chips and Tom's famous homemade guacamole dip, which gave me a great idea to give Sarah a break from having the kids underfoot in the kitchen.

The pits from the avocados that Tom used are just what I needed to get the kids interested in a bit of indoor gardening. We washed the pits, now we'll let them dry out for a couple of days. Then we'll be able to get them started on their way to becoming pretty little indoor trees. By the way, if you want to do this yourself, make sure you use the Florida variety, which sprouts quicker than its California cousin.

It's really easy to get them started. Once the outer seed coating on the pits looks brown and dry, we just peel it off and get ready to grow! We'll fill a glass with water to about an inch from the top. I always add a little crushed charcoal to the bottom of the glass before filling it - this will help prevent fungal growth.

Next, I'll help the kids push a few toothpicks into the avocado pit at equal distances around its middle, so that we can rest the toothpicks on the edge of the glass (the bottom of the pit should just touch the water). The glass needs to go in a warm dark area for a few weeks, and I'll refill the water as needed. When the roots start to show, we'll move the glass to a sunny location.

Once the stem's sprouted about 3-4 inches, it'll need to be transplanted to a container. It's important to keep the top half of the pit above the soil and to make sure that the roots are spread evenly. I'll keep it in that sunny location and make sure it's well watered.

After we got done with the indoor gardening lesson, the kids went back to their cookie decorating for a while. But, as kids often do, they started to get a bit restless. My beautiful bride decided that it was time for Grandpa to take them outside for a while to run off some of that energy. So we all got bundled up, rounded up Sally (she wasn't restless, but a dog can always use some fresh air and a run), and headed outdoors.

Joshua and Connor (Billy's two eldest) had brought their hockey skates, so we cleared off that little pond we dug last summer. Not quite as long as a hockey rink, but there's enough room for a couple of young hockey stars (and their cousin Amanda, who can skate a figure eight and do those fancy whirly moves). Sally had a great time slip-sliding all over the ice trying to catch them.

The little ones and I tramped around the yard, filling up Sarah's birdfeeders. She loves to bird-watch from her kitchen window, so I like to make sure that we keep their "restaurants" filled.

Now, tonight, as I sit by my fire with my Sarah, the house becomes quiet. The kids are all tucked in and dreaming sweet dreams, Laura plays some soft Christmas carols on the piano, everyone else is curled up with a book. But wait, what's that sound I hear? Sleigh bells? Reindeer clattering on the roof? No... it's just that old stomach rumbling. Guess I'll take myself off to the kitchen to rustle up some of that wonderful gingerbread and a cold glass of milk...

Happy Holidays from the Meadows family to yours!