

Tinker Time



January 2009

Having an energy efficient home is something everyone should strive for – we certainly try. Even though we've re-insulated the attic spaces, we still have heat escaping from our roof and with the amount of snow we've had up there this year, the escaping heat has melted the snow up there and produced a bumper crop of icicles – especially on the south side of the house. Whenever we have large bounties of icicles I try to make some "icicle stars" and hang them around the garden. It's also something that's great fun to do with the kids.

Here's how to make your own:

What you'll need...

- Icicles! – Duh!
- Some snow.
- A Snowy flat surface to work on – I do mine on the picnic table in the garden or you can do them on the ground too.
- A container that you can easily and neatly pour water from.
- A soft brush or duster for cleanup at the end

How to make them...

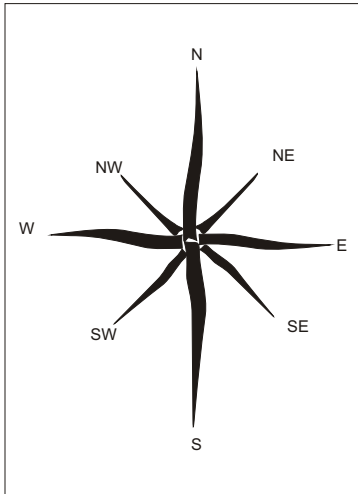
You may want to make a smaller one to start with and then move on to a larger one as you get the hang of it. We're basically going to be making a "**compass rose**" and so I'll refer to the icicles in their respective compass



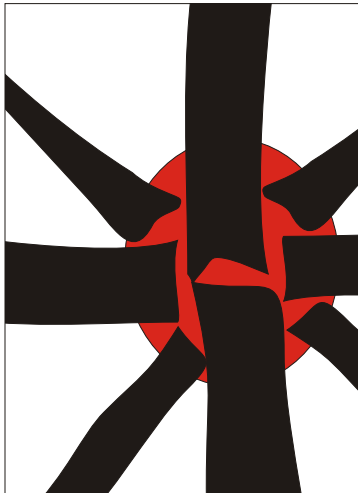
positions. Pick icicles that look good together and are proportional. Icicles are pretty delicate things so be careful when you pick them. I try and use 2 hands so that I can adequately support them when I break them off.

Typically the one that points **south** (the bottom of the star when it's hanging) is the largest and longest. The **north, west and east** can be of equal size or the north one can be a little larger. You need to work on a snow-

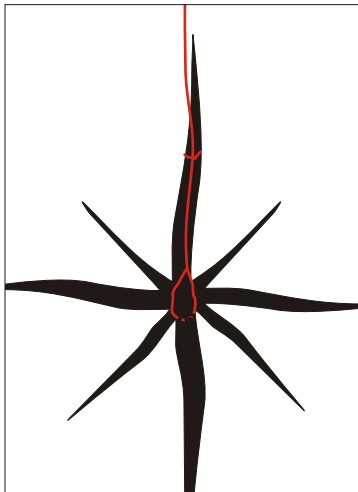
covered flat area - I use a picnic table, but the ground is fine too. Begin by creating a hollow spot on your work surface. This will be the spot where the bases of the icicles will converge forming the "hub". This is where the icicles will be "welded" together. The icicles are laid flat on the surface with their bases over the hole and their points radiating out to the 8 compass points. Place your icicles in position making sure that you get their bases as close together as possible. I usually put the N and S touching each other then position E and W on either side. The star will be supported and strung up (more on that later) by this hub so it's important to get everything really tight. Once you've placed the 4 major icicles you can place the 4 minor ones (NE, SE, SW, NW) again making sure to get them together as close as possible. When everything's in place, take a step back and make sure you are happy with your composition. It's now time to "weld" the star together. The welding is done with really cold water and this is the part that takes the most time (and patience) - smaller stars are easier and faster. Fill your container to about half way with cold water. Slowly add snow to the water until the snow will no longer melt. We're trying to get the water to the freezing mark. Pack some snow into the



Lay out the icicles in the shape of a *compass rose*. The one that will hang down (South) should be the largest



Position the base of the icicles as close together as possible. The red area is where you pack snow and then pour water over the area every 5min or so. Let it freeze between waterings



The completed star is hung by tying a loop around the base of the "south" icicle and an additional loop is made on the "north" icicle

gaps where the bases of the icicles meet. Be careful here so you don't move their position. Slowly pour a little water on the "hub" of your star where all the bases meet. The snow you packed in there should turn translucent. We're going to be doing this very

often so don't be impatient here. Pour a little water then leave it alone! We're waiting for the water to freeze everything together. Come back every 3 to 5 minutes or so and pour some more water to build up the weld. For a big star, I usually do this about 5 to 10

times. If all is well, you should be able to lift the star (carefully and slowly) and spin it over so you can work on the other side. Again, place the hub over the hollow spot of your work surface. Repeat the process of packing snow (carefully) in the gaps and again go through the water pouring ritual (about 5 to 10 times again)

Hanging it up...

If you were patient enough and worked carefully enough, the star is now ready to be hung. Find a place where the sun will hit it as this will show off your artistry. I hang mine from the Birch tree in the back yard. Ideally, you want some strong mono-filament (fishing) line but even white nylon string will do – just make sure it's strong enough to support your star. You're going to need some help with this so grab a friend. While the star is still lying flat on the work surface, tie a secure loop around the **south** icicle as close to the hub as you can. If you are using fishing line then make sure it will not unravel when the weight of the star is on the loop.

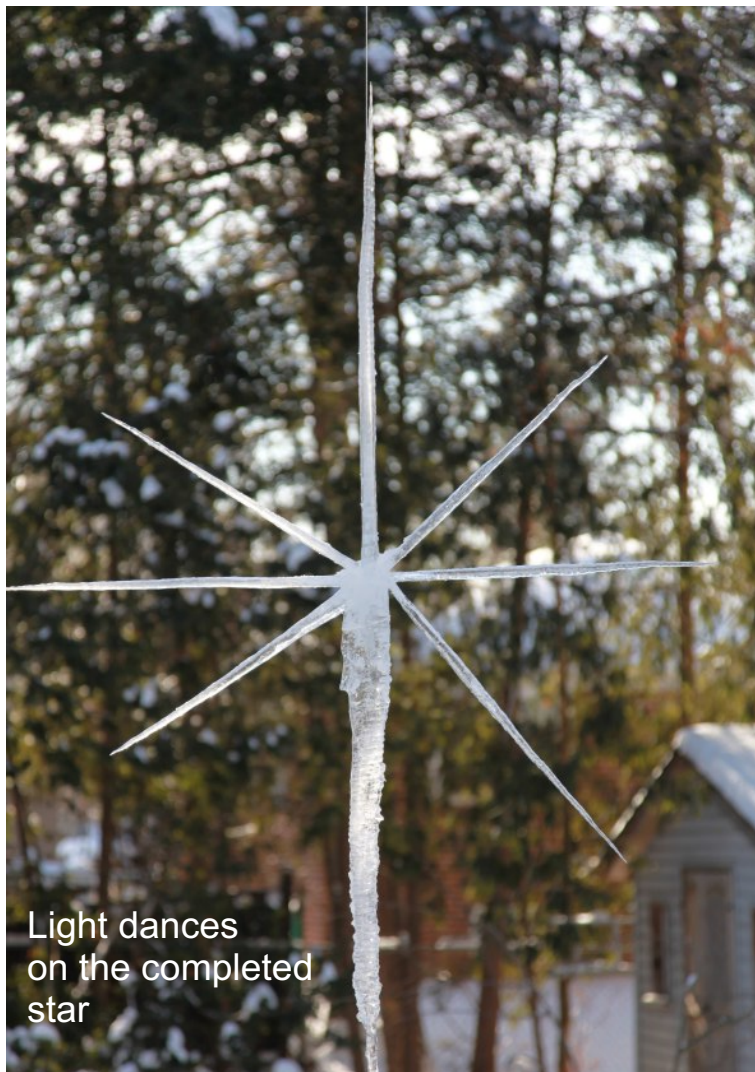
Make a hitch (loop) about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up the **north** icicle. This will serve to keep your icicle upright. Remember, the **weight** of the icicle is supported by the loop on the **south** icicle.

Carefully lift the icicle so it is vertical (as it would hang) and carry it to where you are going to hang it. Once you have it in position, **slowly** let the star hang from its support. Try to avoid any jerking or snapping motion because it will break the star! Once you've hung the star **carefully** dust the snow from your star with a soft brush or duster.

If you're lucky enough and there are no warm spells or heavy winds, the star should last quite some time! **T**



A bumper crop



Light dances on the completed star