November’s secret

November. Each day the sun rises a few minutes later and sets a few min-
utes earlier. Days grow chilly. Nightly frosts become the rule. It’s just a mat-
time of the first snow falls. Yes, it’s November.

By month’s end, the whole world seems on the brink of death. The few
brown leaves that cling tenaciously to their branches eventually will fall, leaving behind naked, seemingly life-
less trees. They will have become mere skeletons of their summer selves. Hay-
fields and thickets fade to brown. The sky turns monotonously gray

November’s lifelessness, however, is an illusion. Though the world is col-
orless, cold, and dark, appearances deceive. November signals the start of the season of transition and dormancy, not the beginning of the end.

Though plants seem to die, most sim-
ply rest for a few months. Otherwise, their soft tissues would freeze, and the plants would indeed be destroyed. But when sunshine and warmth return in April, seeds germinate, buds swell, and again the world becomes a sea of green.

Most adult insects die as the world turns cold, but their populations per-
sist as other stages of life—eggs, larvae, or cocoons. Planting mantises pass the year’s harshest months in their distinctiv-
ecosystem—like egg cases. Isabella tiger moths overwinter as familiar banded

wooly bears. Large silk moth pupae
while winter away in protective co-
coons wrapped in cryptic dead leaves.

Most migratory birds have already
worked their way out of the places where they spend their days last longer and food abounds. Har-
der winter residents return to backyard
bird feeders. Seeds and suet provide the caloric boost to make it from one frigid day to the next.

White-tailed deer battle for breeding
rights. The biggest and strongest bucks dominate the rut, chase small herds of does, create chaos on busy streets and highways, and foil overconfident hunt-
ers.

Beneath the still liquid surfaces of ponds and lakes, turtles and frogs lie dormant under several inches of muck. They “breathe” osmotically through their skin. Fish slow down, eat less and frustrate die-hard cold-water anglers.

Raccoons, skunks, and opossums sleep through the coldest days but venture forth to forage when weath-
erness permits. Bears, ground hogs, and chipmunks disappear into their dens for long winter naps. Their metabolic rates slow to a glacial pace. Call it hi-
bernation or dormancy, even children understand its necessity.

Predators such as great horned owls, red-tailed hawks, weasels, coyotes, foxes, and bobcats depend on prey that do not hibernate or migrate. Seem-
ingly limitless populations of mice, voles, squirrels, andcottontails sustain na-
ture’s hunters.

Oaks, beeches, and hickories drop their nuts, and squirrels race to gath-
er them. It seems impossible that nuts could defend themselves from the an-
imals onslaught of hungry squirrels, but white oaks escape by germinating soon after they fall to the ground.

Rather than waiting for spring, white oak taproots grow rapidly in the fall and serve as the winter food-storage
organ. By transferring much of the en-
ergy that was in the acorn to a sub-
terranean taproot, white oak escape predation by squirrels and other nut hunters.

Gray squirrels, however, have learned to beat white oats at their own

Get tickets for oil painting raffle fundraiser

The Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council is selling raffle tickets for a 20" x

20" oil painting by local artist Larissa Flynn. The painting depicts Little Trac-
verse Bay and Harbor Springs from the viewpoint of Petoskey. Flynn donated the painting to the Watershed Council to assist the non-profit organization in

their fundraising efforts. Tickets will be sold through Dec. 15 with the draw-
taking place on Dec. 16. Tickets can be purchased online at www.wa-
tershedcouncil.org/shop or in person at the Watershed Council office. Each $20 raffle ticket purchased will get you an entry into the raffle drawing.

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