

Make Your MEA Unforgettable

With Minnesota Grown

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www.minnesotagrown.com

Each year, students across the state wait anxiously for the long weekend a break from their studies commonly known as MEA. MEA Weekend is the nickname for the no-school days, and long weekend every year in October that has been created by the Education Minnesota Professional Conferences. The Education Minnesota union holds a two-day conference for teachers in St. Paul the third weekend of October and classes are cancelled for students across Minnesota. In 2015, the conference will take place October 15-16.

Make the most of your MEA weekend and take advantage of the great, local activities available from our Minnesota Grown members! Road trips can be an extremely memorable experience for you and your family, and Minnesota offers tons of great day trip (or more) destinations. Try a trip to:

Apple Orchards

Apple orchards are open for visitors and Minnesota Grown members are reporting big, healthy crops. Many apple orchards will offer family-friendly entertainment to enjoy in addition to pre-picked or pick-your-own apples, cider and baked goodies! Play areas, hay rides, petting zoos and more make this a great destination. [Find a Minnesota Grown apple orchard](#) near you in our online Directory.

Pumpkin Patch

MEA is right before Halloween and, as you may have read in our other articles, pumpkins make an excellent fall decoration piece. Take a peek at our article on [Picking the Perfect Pumpkin](#) and check out the designs shared below to make your pumpkin stand out from the neighbors. Take your kids to the pumpkin patch, go on a hay ride, get lost (and found) in a corn maze, visit a petting zoo, and more. Some pumpkin patches even have special events planned for MEA weekend and Halloween. [Find a Minnesota Grown pumpkin patch](#) near you by visiting our online Directory.

Get Outta Town

Getting a little reprieve from the city and heading out of town is a popular choice for MEA Weekend. Whether you are planning to head north, south, east or west, Minnesota Grown fall fun is an excellent option for you. It's easy to find apple orchards, pumpkin patches, corn mazes, petting zoos, farm tours and more near your destination or en route.

Minnesota Grown also offers six farmstays throughout the state. It is a good idea to call now to check on availability for the long weekend. Try a search of the [Minnesota Grown Directory](#) today.

Planning to stay home over MEA Weekend instead? Try these fun ideas for activities that entertain the whole family!

It's pumpkin carving season

Pumpkin carving can help Halloween reach its full, frightening potential. You can find hundreds of fun patterns and stencils online to create traditional Jack-o'-Lanterns with both ghoulish grins and friendly faces.



But decorating with pumpkins doesn't always mean cutting and carving! [Click here](#) for 60 new ways to decorate your Halloween pumpkins. Don't forget to buy Minnesota Grown pumpkins! Look for our logo at your local grocery, or find a producer near you by searching our [online Directory](#).

Winter is coming

As birds begin to move to their over winter homes, the locals of the Minnesota bird population look different. Not all birds can handle the harsh Minnesota winters, and those that do are looking to prepare for the cold winter months. The familiar Black-capped Chickadee will be mobbing the bird feeders as the weather cools, joined by Northern Cardinals, American goldfinches, Nuthatches, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Blue Jays and more. Make sure you are attracting a lovely variety of winter dwelling birds by establishing your home as a good

location for a quick bite to eat. Follow the steps below to help the kids make a pinecone birdfeeder, string it in the trees, and watch for your first visitors!

You will need: (per feeder) Twine, wire, or yarn, one large pinecone, nut butter, birdseed, paper plate

- 1) Attach a wire or string to the top of the pinecone so that you can hang it once finished.
- 2) Spread the nut butter all over the pinecone. Peanut butter is most commonly used, but birds will love alternative butters too! Try sun butter (made from sunflower seeds), cashew butter, or almond butter.
- 3) Once the nut butter is spread, roll and press the pinecone in bird seed. It is easiest to place the seed on the paper plate in a thick layer before rolling. You want the pinecone *well* covered in seeds.
- 4) Hang your pinecone feeder in the desired location and keep your eyes peeled for visitors!



Also try this fun idea for [birdseed cookies](#) to feed your feathered friends.

Pass the dessert

What better way to have a little fall fun than to learn how to make caramel apples at home? There are a lot of autumn food favorites: pumpkin pie, cider, turkey, sweet potatoes... but what about that sweet harvest treat on a stick? Use your Minnesota Grown apple purchase to make caramel apples with your family! Use the tips below for the tastiest caramel apples you have had yet!

The apples: The apples you choose should be similar to those you would use for baking. You want them to be crisp in order to stand up to the heat of the caramel when dipping, and provide a nice contrast of texture when you bite into them. You also want the apples to be fairly tart, as to prevent you from becoming too overwhelmed by sweetness! Give Minnesota classics like Honeycrisp, Sweetango and Zestar! a shot.

The sticks: Sticks for your apples should be strong, yet relatively slender. Try the chopsticks you get with your Chinese take-out! The key is not to separate them, but instead leave the sticks together. You can also find kabob sticks in your local grocery.

The caramel: There are a few different options when it comes to the caramel for your apples. Although it can be time consuming, if done right, making your own caramel will produce the best caramel for dipping, and the tastiest apples. Try the recipe from Food.com below!



Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter
- 2 cups packed brown sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 1 (14 oz) can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla

In a large heavy saucepan, combine the butter, brown sugar, corn syrup and milk; bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Cook and stir until a candy thermometer reads 248 degrees (about 30-40 minutes). Remove from heat and stir in vanilla.

Toppings & decorations: After you have dipped your apple in caramel, you could be done. Or you could take the time to roll your apples in a topping. Here are some delicious ideas to get you started!

A cereal topping is always a tasty option! Using one like Trix, Lucky Charms, or Fruity Cheerios are great if you want to add bright, fun colors that kids and adults will love. Cinnamon Toast Crunch is also a great option to add flavor to every delicious bite.

Rolling your apple in crushed peanuts, almond slivers or smashed walnuts offers up a delicious salty-savory contrast to the tartness of the apple and the sweet taste of the caramel. Also try fun toppings like crushed Oreos or candy corn!

For something even more decadent, roll your apple in chocolate chips! Waiting for your apple to cool before dipping it in dark chocolate, white chocolate or milk chocolate is a great way to add



flavor and visual contrast. You could also try melting the chocolate and drizzling over your apple, or make fun and unique apples by decorating with frosting.

Make Leaf Prints

With the abundance of falling leaves, try this kid-friendly [painting activity](#)!

Here's what you need:

Real fall leaves, white or construction paper, water-based paint/ paint brushes

[Optional Less-Mess Version: Use crayons instead of paints]



1. Collect a bundle of different types of leaves
2. Cover your work area with newspaper or a mat for easy clean up!
3. Paint the entire surface of one side of a leaf
4. Carefully press the painted leaf onto the paper
5. Remove the leaf to reveal your beautiful leaf print!
6. Repeat this process using different color paint and other leaf types and shapes.

[Less-Mess Version]

1. Complete steps 1 and 2 above
2. Place or tape leaf shapes on a flat table surface
3. Place the paper on top of the leaves
4. Rub a crayon on its side and color over the paper where the leaf lies underneath
5. The leaf shape and veins will appear on the paper above!

It's a season of learning

The kids may be on "break" from classes, but that doesn't mean they have to take a break from learning! There are tons of fun, and educational, activities that are best done this time of year. Bundle up against the chill in the air and head to the backyard for these fun activities!

1. Jar Pets – Study nature from your backyard up close. Kids enjoy making drawings of the bugs you keep temporarily!

2. Leaf Rainbow – Enjoy the colors of fall while you search for color.

3. Backyard Science (Playful Learning) – This Playful Learning activity pack is full of family play ideas like making a "sound map" in your back yard, and includes printables and short online videos to explain each activity to the kids.

4. Applesauce and the 5 Senses – Simple and satisfying. Kids especially love using a hand crank apple peeler and of course, eating the treat they've prepared!

5. Fairy Houses (Amazon, book) – Kids love this Fairy Houses book. It tells a story about a child visiting a beautiful forest and making a fairy house. It gives ideas for making one each season. Fallen leaves and seeds are perfect for backyard fairy house building!

6. Leaf Labyrinth – A labyrinth has one path to follow. Your fallen leaves offer the perfect easy to use medium for making your own yard labyrinth to walk with the kids.

7. Nature Display (Playful Learning) – Go on a walk or backyard explore, and then show off the beautiful fall nature items you've found. Use various containers for display and take a photo of items you need to leave in nature.

8. Great Backyard Bird Count – Bird watching is an activity the whole family can enjoy. Grab your notebooks and colored pencils to try and draw the birds you see. A regional bird identification book will help you identify the birds in your yard.

9. Dinner on a Stick (Amazon, book)– Take your family to make a fire in out patio fire pit and cook dinner on a stick. The nip in the fall air makes for perfect snuggling weather while watching the flames!

Happy MEA!

With help from
[About Travel](#), [Minnesota Grown](#), [Country Living](#)