

## **Your Garden as Your Decoration “Shop”**

By Kate O’Lenic, Master Gardener

Your gardens provide for you and your family all year long. It’s not just vegetables and beautiful flowers. You can create the freshest indoor and outdoor holiday decorations right now from your gardens. A few favorite plants to use include cedar and pine for their wonderful fragrance, ivy, and holly. You can create wreaths, table centerpieces, swags, and “kissing” bundles.

### **What to Use**

Evergreens can make up the bulk of your decorations. Pine, firs, cedar, boxwood, junipers, and mountain laurel are excellent choices. Pines, firs, and cedars last several weeks and make great choices for indoor decorations. You’ll also enjoy the wonderful fragrance from the pines, firs, cedar, and junipers. If you want to use boxwoods, check the aroma first as it is one of those love it or hate it fragrances. Other evergreens to consider include arborvitae, gold cypress,

Magnolia leaves are a dramatic choice for their large size and the glossy dark green top with the velvety brown underside. Magnolia leaves are also long-lasting with minimal effort.

Spruce and broadleaf evergreens such as laurels are better for use outdoors as they hold up better in the cooler outdoor temperatures.

Mixing different greens can add color and texture for more interest. For even more color and interest, add fresh or dried fruit and flowers to your display. The berries, cotton bolls, acorns, pinecones, dry hydrangea flower clusters, and seed pods from different plants can add that extra something to your project. If you have red or gold dogwood, the bare branches make quite a statement in an arrangement.

### **How to Collect and Prepare the Components**

To harvest branches from your evergreens, keep pruning techniques in mind. Use sharp and clean cutter. Think about maintaining the natural shape of the shrub or tree by carefully choosing what to cut. Spread the cuts evenly and be conservative about how much to take off. Check the branches and choose those that are flexible and holding their needles. Make sure, too, that the needles are all green (no brown tips).

Female holly plants have beautiful red berries that will make a bright highlight in your design. Keep the cut branches from freezing to avoid them turning black.

After cutting your branches, crush the cut ends to allow it to absorb more water, then soak them in warm water for 24 hours or at least overnight. This will ensure they are well hydrated and more fire resistant. For added safety, you may want to use a commercially available product to reduce flammability.

### **Keep It Safe**

If you are hanging decorations high enough to require a ladder, follow some basic ladder safety tips.

- Use ladders or stepladders of the proper height, not chairs or other furniture.

- A rule of thumb is to place a ladder one foot away from the wall for every 4 feet of ladder height.
- For stability, have 3 points of contact with the ladder, such as 2 feet and 1 hand or 2 hands and one foot.
- Always face the ladder and keep your hips between the side rails.
- Use a ladder with slip-resistant feet and wear shoes that are also slip-resistant.

Check your displays every two days or so. If some of the evergreens appear dry, remove them.

Keep the decorations away from flames, heating system vents, and sunny windows. If lights are used in the arrangement, use cool lights. Some light bulbs can become too warm and could pose a fire hazard.

Keep your children and pets safe. Prevent dogs and cats from trying to eat the greenery and berries. Children may also be attracted to berries. Berries of holly, yew and mistletoe are poisonous to children and pets. Prevent pets from drinking the water of the reservoir if you have a cut live tree.

The resources listed below provide all the details you'll need to create fabulous holiday decorations. Get creative and have fun!

### **Resources**

Holiday Decorating with Fresh Greenery Factsheet HGIC 1753,  
<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/holiday-decorating-with-fresh-greenery/>

Holiday Decorating with Fresh Greenery, <https://www.johnson.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/agent-articles/miscellaneous/holiday-decorating-with-fresh-greenery.html>

The Do's and Don'ts of Holiday Decorating with Plants, <https://news.vt.edu/articles/2021/12/ext-holiday-wreaths.html>

Ladder Safety for Holiday Decorating  
<https://www.wisconsin.edu/ehs/osh/winter-weather-safety/ladder-safety-for-holiday-decorating/>

The next University of Tennessee Master Gardener class at the Sullivan County Extension Office located at 140 Spurgeon Ln, Blountville, TN. starts on **January 30, 2024** and continues every Tuesday for 14 weeks.

**10AM – 12noon**

**Call the Extension Office for information and application form.**

**423-574-1919**

### **How do I ask a question?**

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.