

Grow Your Own Holiday Greenery (published 2025-11-08)

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Decorating with fresh greenery is one of the oldest winter holiday traditions. Whether in wreaths, garlands, swags, or centerpieces, the sight and scent of natural evergreens evoke the Christmas season. Gardeners have an inherent advantage when decking the halls; we can grow plants in our yards that will provide greenery for decorating year after year. With the wide variety of evergreen plants that grow in this area, gardeners who plan and plant ahead can collect materials for the freshest, most unique decorations just by stepping outside the door.

The most obvious reason to grow your own greenery is freshness. Boughs that you clip in your garden are far fresher than those purchased and last far longer in arrangements. As a further bonus, you can easily replenish trimmings if they start to dry out over the holiday season. You need not worry about pruning in December; light pruning will not harm your plants, though heavy pruning should wait until later. Remember, as you gather your evergreen bounty, these plants are part of your landscape and should be pruned judiciously. Distribute cuts evenly around the plant to preserve its form.

Growing your own evergreens can offer a far more diverse palette of plant materials for decorating than those available for purchase. Part of the joy of making your own wreaths and other arrangements is creating unique designs, and an assortment of evergreen plants can provide many different shades and textures to spark the imagination. Evergreens are not simply green. Their foliage ranges from gold, light to dark green, bluish gray, and purple. Some are tipped in white, while others are gold-edged or variegated. Foliage may be of different textures too, from round branches with long or short needles to flat fern-like sprays, to glossy broad-leafed boughs with large or small leaves. You can choose a blend of colors and textures that suits your décor or simply appeals to your creative eye. Whether mixing 3 or 4 kinds of clippings equally or using one variety for a base with another for accent, there are so many possible combinations.

Some of the best evergreens for decorating found in home gardens are pine, boxwood, juniper (including Eastern red cedar), holly, yew, magnolia, and arborvitae. Some less common varieties that make striking additions to a wreath and your landscape are Arizona cypress (*Hesperocyparis arizonic*), Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*), and false cypress (*Chamaecyparis spp*). As you choose your materials, remember that, in general, cone-bearing or needled evergreens last longer than broad-leafed evergreens.

To create a wreath using your home-grown greenery, you will need a wreath frame (a wire form, grapevine or even a heavy-duty wire coat hanger), paddle wire (22- 24 gauge), pruning shears, and any embellishments you wish to add, like cones, berries, dried flowers, ribbon, or special decorations.

Begin by heading outside with your pruners, gloves, and a large trash bag to cut branches of selected trees and shrubs. Next, cut the branches into pieces sized appropriately for the finished wreath. The most common beginner's mistake is using pieces that are too long. For a 14-inch wreath form, 8-inch-long pieces work well. Cut all the greens to length before you begin binding.

Once your materials are ready, securely fasten the end of the paddle wire to the frame. Next, form an attractive bundle of 4-5 sprigs of greenery and lay it on the frame. Wrap the cut ends with 2-4 turns of the wire to tightly secure it to the frame. Don't cut your paddle wire until the very end. Position the next bundle of sprigs so that it overlaps the first like shingles on a roof and fasten again. Be sure to pull the wire tight each time. Continue this procedure all the way around your frame. To finish, hold back the first sprigs and tuck the base of the last bundle beneath the foliage of the first group and fasten it to the frame, being careful not to catch the tops of the first sprigs in the binding. Finally, secure the wire to the frame. To add cones, ribbons, or other decorations, attach wire to each separately and then wire to the frame.

If you would like more guidance in crafting a wreath or you would simply like to have all the beautiful plant materials laid out to choose from, Exchange Place Living History Farm, 4812 Orebank Road in Kingsport, is holding its annual Wreath Making Workshops on Tuesday, December 2, from 6 - 8 p.m. and on Wednesday, December 3, from 10 a.m.-12 noon. The \$40 fee includes all materials - a wide assortment of greenery, cones, dried flowers, etc., along with wreath form and wire, and light refreshments. Space is limited. For more information or to register, email exchangeplace.edu@gmail.com or call 423-288-6071. Registration deadline is November 29.

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