

We all decorate using greens, plants, herbs, and fresh or dried, blending their colors and textures. You need to remember texture, contrast, compliments, tones, fragrance, and Christmas colors or combining the colors of your room with the season greens – traditional holly with red berries or variegated holly, balsam fir, noble fir, Douglas fir, silver fir, Fraser firs – all have their own color of green or blue-green or silver-green or the white pine for its long needle airy feel. Incense cedar, or regional juniper with berries, hemlock and boxwood. Also to be considered is the magnolia and eucalyptus, red berry hawthorn, with twig for the natural look. There are so many extras to work with such as a wide range of cones, hemlock, red spruce, white spruce, sugar cone, lodge pole cones, white pine, Norway spruce, Jeffrey, Ponderosa.

The use of herbs are a natural grown outdoors mixed with the Eucalyptus for example the Artemisia “Silver King” grown by many St. Louis gardeners mix with some holly, boxwood, apples, orange and of course the pineapple (the symbol of welcome), can enhance any entry or porch gable. For added touch buy some pomegranates keep some natural, and/or spray the others gold.

Other herbs that add to a wreath or swag are sage, lavender, thyme, lamb’s ears.

For a rustic or country effect, combine a sunflower, ears of corn, wheat, holly, white pine or cedar, barley, millet, some white birch branches and a bow makes a great lamp or back yard swag or wreath for holiday cheer and feeding the birds at the same time. Any and all acorns, nuts, berries, unique twigs can be incorporated into your interior or exterior magic holiday spirit of your own.

Many natural traditions are recycling – a Scandinavian tradition of hanging a “Jule -Neg” bundles for the birds. In Norway at harvest time several of the best bundles of grain were stored in a special place until Christmas Eve. When the long-anticipated time for us/children/and birds/wildlife were also given a gold sheaf of grain securely attached to a pole outdoors and were called “Jule Neg” which means “Christmas bundle”. Now this loving custom has been revived with fall/harvest time and makes a great gift to give or receive or use a gift for your Thanksgiving hostess, and the reason for Thanksgiving and general remembrance of the upcoming holiday season of giving to all including our feathered friends.

GUIDE TO HOLIDAY GREENS: (in floral arrangements)

COOL AND MOIST FOR LONG LIFE - Probably the biggest challenge in working with holiday greens is the prevention of drying out. In order to avoid the frustration of dull, crisp holly and shedding, brown needles, always keep the greens in cool, moist Conditions.

For **TRADITIONAL EVERGREENS**, this means temperatures below 40°F in a location where high humidity can be insured. In cooler climates, outdoor storage is popular and acceptable as long as temperatures stay below 40°F.

The greens **SHOULD NOT** be stored outside directly on pavement or in boxes but ideally on pallets to allow good air circulation. Cover the piles with a tarp at night or when severe weather approaches.

Branches can be stored loose in a cool, sheltered spot protected from drafts and direct sun. Direct sun will dry out and discolor greens, and windy conditions will also dry them out. They can be sprinkled with water every few days if it's not raining or freezing.

Ideally, the best storage situation is to keep the greens boxed in a floral cooler at 34-36°F and 85% humidity. When shipments arrive, open boxes, inspect, loosen or fluff them up, close boxes loosely, and place in the cooler. Inspect and loosen branches every few days.

For **HOLLY** pay extra attention to maintaining proper temperature and humidity requirements. These yuletide greens cannot be exposed to freezing temperatures and must be carefully protected from drying out. For best results, store in moisture-retaining packages in the cooler at 34-36°F and 85% humidity.

HOLLY AND MISTLETOE should not be in tight containers or plastic bags. Loosen periodically in boxes and make sure bags are perforated. (A package can still be moisture-retaining while being perforated.)

One lesser-known fact about two common holiday greens - holly and mistletoe - is that they are in the ethylene sensitive category. Exposure to low levels of ethylene can actually cause leaf and berry drop! Precautions must be taken, such as good air circulation and careful packaging.

FOOD AND WATER – Don't take greens directly from bags or boxes and put into designs. Do condition them just like cut flowers with floral preservative solution prior to displaying in buckets or designing, with the exception of MISTLETOE. Failure to condition will lead to early drying out and shortened vase life.

To condition, first give stems a fresh cut to remove hardened sap, bacteria and debris that can be clogging the stem ends. Use sharp shear; pounding or shredding is not necessary. Remove lower leaves or needles; then put into warm floral preservative solution. Let stems or branches stand in the solution at least two hours; then put into the cooler until needed. A total conditioning time of at least 24 hours is best, especially if the

greens have been stored dry. Re-cut the stems again before using in a vase or arrangement. Use floral preservative solution in all display buckets and designs, and add more solution to foam-based arrangements daily.

One more note on protection. Laws in many states require cut trees and greens displayed in public to be fireproofed. Be sure to check into laws in your state and use commercial products manufactured for that purpose.

SELECTING YOUR FRESH LIVE CHRISTMAS TREE AND HOW TO KEEP IT SAFE:

1. Freshness is an important key when selecting your tree. The needles should be resilient, and not brittle. Run your finger down a branch - the needles should stay attached. Feel the bottom of the trunk. On fresh trees it will feel sappy moist. In general, the more recently cut the tree - the fresher it will be.
2. Just before putting the tree in its stand, you should cut about an inch or two of the trunk off. The resins which have sealed the end of the stump are thus removed and the tree can take up water more readily. A tree which has been allowed to become extremely dry by improper storage will not take up new moisture. Also, remove any old dead needles which have been trapped near the trunk of the tree.
3. Be sure to put the tree in a stand that will hold water. Keep the water level above the base of the tree at all times. Most trees will consume a pint of water or more each day, especially the first few days. Water uptake is still the best single means of keeping your tree safe and fresh.
4. Be sure that the base of the tree is well supported and the tree is placed away from the fireplace, radiators, electric heaters, televisions or any other sources of heat.
5. For safety the tree should not be decorated with cotton, paper, or other materials that burn readily. Wax candles and other types of open flame should be avoided. Lights and wiring should be checked for worn spots and cracks and care should be taken not to overload electric circuits. When you leave your home or retire for the night turn off the tree lights.
6. Trees should be properly disposed of and the needles never burned in a fireplace. A suggestion for after Christmas: Put the tree in the yard and watch it become a haven for birds.
7. Know how to properly use your Christmas tree and have a safe and happy holiday.

AS CHRISTMAS TREES THE FIRS WERE FIRST

No one is really sure what evergreen tree was the first Christmas tree, but some believe that the fir was the most likely candidate. The use of evergreen trees for Christmas evolved in Germany and spread throughout central Europe. Silver fir was a native tree of the area, held its needles well, and would remain attractive after it was cut. Even today in many areas where people are not familiar with types of evergreens, they will call any evergreen tree a “fir”. I noticed a recent ad in which Noble fir trees could be shipped to individuals for holiday use throughout the U.S.

Firs are stately trees belonging to the plant genus *Abies*. For outdoor growth they require cool temperatures and a moist atmosphere. Therefore, most true fir trees are native to the mountain ranges of the world or moist northern climates. Balsam fir was at one time the most popular North American fir for use as a Christmas tree. Its strong fragrance when placed indoors has made it the one often associated with the holiday season, and the fragrance copied for use in early “evergreen” aerosol sprays. The needle retention of firs is good under home conditions.

Since most firs are trees of cool climates, they are not normally used for local holiday tree production or for landscape plantings in our climate. Summers are often too hot and dry which will weaken trees and make them short lived. As holiday trees, Scotch pines have largely replaced firs in modern homes. They are easier to produce in our climate and have excellent needle retention in the home. If you have already purchased a holiday tree but are not sure what kind you have, here are a few tips to identification. If the needles are grouped into bundles which can be pulled from the tree and remain in a bundle, you have a pine. Most often needles will be in bundles of two or five. If the tree has thin flexible needles of five in a bundle, it is most likely a white pine. If there are two needles in a bundle, which are stiff and slightly twisted, it is most likely a Scotch pine. Other pines are sometimes used as Christmas trees, but these two species are the most common.

If the needles on the tree you have purchased are held singly and not in bundles, you may have a spruce or fir. If the needles are stiff, sharp and develop from all sides of the twigs although they may face upward, you may have a spruce. Spruce needles are squares or diamond-shaped. When a needle is broken in half, look at the broken end for an angular shape. If that shape is present it is most likely a spruce. Spruces make attractive, although fairly expensive, holiday trees. Norway spruce or Colorado blue spruce are often available as balled-and-bur lapped trees for use indoors during the holidays and then should be planted promptly into the landscape.

If the needles are flattened rather than angular in cross section, the tree may well be a true fir or possibly a Douglas fir or hemlock. If the needles are fairly small, lie in a flat plane

on thin twigs with obvious whitish lines beneath them, the tree is most likely a hemlock. Hemlocks are less common as holiday trees. If the needles are flat, waxy, but with white lines beneath, it could be a balsam or other true fir. If there are no lines beneath the needles, it might be a Douglas fir.

Whatever holiday tree is used, it will be safer and last longer if the base is cut off at least one-half inch before it is placed in water. Use a stand that holds ample water and keep it filled. A tree will rapidly absorb water during the first days indoors, possibly a gallon in 24 hours and a quart a day for the first few days, so it is particularly important to watch the stand and make sure the base of the trunk is always in water. Some tests have indicated that an interruption in water flow can lead to as much needle drop as not putting the tree in water at all. In the usually drier indoor atmosphere, water is lost rapidly from the needles. A 6-foot tree can absorb about a quart of water daily. Spraying trees with a fire retardant is also beneficial as long as the tree is not allowed to dry out. Remember that this is only a retardant that prevents flash fires. Safety in wiring of lights, locating trees away from heat sources, avoidance of flammable items near a tree, as well as all other safety precautions, are still very important for all evergreen decorations.

The origin of some of the first American Christmas trees I have read about, range from a home-sick German Hessian troop when they had to fight the Revolutionary War. Another being set up by Charles Follen, a German professor at Harvard, in 1832. Another is credited to August Imbred of Wooster, Ohio, who decorated a tree for his nephew and niece in 1847.

The Evergreen tree is usually called a fir in the legends because “fir” is a layman’s term for all evergreens and because few of those who translated the legends knew botany. In England, it was symbolic of life enduring. In Germany, it was decorated with flowers and colored eggs. One legend says the “fir” was the original tree of life in Eden and had big leaves and blossoms until Eve ate of its fruit. In punishment, its leaves were shrunken to needles, its fruit to cones. Another legend says it bloomed again the night of the Nativity and thus became the First Christmas Tree.

Cleveland, Ohio, had a tree in 1851, set up by Pastor Henry Schwan from his congregation. President Franklin Pierce, our 14th President, did much to spread the customs by having a Christmas tree in the White House when the Sunday School of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church was entertained there.

In 1923 President Calvin Coolidge started the national Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, now held every year on the White House lawn.

It was another American President, however, who almost stopped the custom. President Theodore Roosevelt noted for his efforts in conservation of our natural

resources, banned the Christmas tree tradition at the White House. His sons, however, smuggled a tree in and when confronted with their crime, were defended by America's first forester Gifford Pinchot. He convinced the president that the cutting of young Evergreens could be helpful in forest conservation and in so doing established a new industry in America which now annually markets over 30 million Christmas trees.

This year with the drought you really need to pre soak you tree with some Fresh water Daily it would be beneficial to do this a few days before in the garage or on a porch weather permitting (freezing) . In general -

Testing for freshness: A fresh tree has a good fragrance and good color along with ease of bending the needles between your thumb and forefinger. If it is fresh, the needles will bend and snap back with ease. Also reach and touch the center of the tree and grasp a branch. Slide your hand out along the branch. If the tree is fresh, the needles will stay intact and will not fall off. Now if you are untying a new tree, pick up the tree and shake it first, getting off the old needles, then give it the test again.

Just before putting the tree in its stand, just cut about an inch off the trunk. The resins which have sealed the end of the stump are thus removed and the tree can take up water more readily. A tree which has been allowed to become sealed will not take up new moisture.

Be sure you put the tree in a stand that will hold enough water. Keep the water level above the base of the tree at all times. Most trees will consume a quart of water or more each day, especially the first few days. Water uptake is still the best single means of keeping your tree safe and fresh.

Be sure that the base of the tree is well supported and the tree is placed away from the fireplace, radiators, electric heaters, televisions or any other sources of heat.

Being safety minded, a real tree should not be decorated with cotton, paper, or other materials that burn readily. If you have young children this cannot be avoided because they have probably made ornaments at school -- so be sure to keep these away from lights or heat source. Wax candles and other types of open flame should be avoided. Lights and wiring should be checked for worn spots and cracks and care should be taken not to overload electric circuits. When you leave your home or retire for the night, turn off, if possible unplug, the tree lights.

A two-foot high tree takes approximately 100-150 miniature lights, 20 ft. of garland and 25-30 decorations. A six-footer would take 300-450 mini lights, 75 ft. of garland, and 100-150 decorations. The decorations/ornaments could range from a theme idea, glass ornaments, handmade items, dolls, or bows, 25-30 decorations. A six-footer would take

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When decorating a tree, place the lights on the tree first from top to bottom, back and forth, from inside the tree and back out (the in and out will give the tree depth and fullness) so that the plug-s are always in the center of the tree or at the bottom of the tree. The only exception is if you use a lighted tree topper, I would suggest a designated or separate extension cord for this topper.

A tree is usually decorated lights first, ornaments and decorations, and then garland, tinsel, baby's breath or special finishing touch.

Trees should be properly disposed of and the needles Never Burned in a fireplace. A suggestion for after Christmas: put the tree in the yard and watch it become a haven for birds by laying it outside in the yard below a bird feeder for the birds for protection, or take it to a site that is going to have them recycled by shredding and used as mulch.

Christmas Trees: the Environment & Post Holiday Uses

Breathe deeply at a Christmas tree farm and you will not only enjoy the fresh pine fragrance, but also fresh, oxygenated air. That's because of photosynthesis: the trees absorb carbon dioxide-laden air and emit oxygen.

Just one acre of Christmas trees produces the daily oxygen requirement for 18 people. Young trees in their rapid growth years have a high rate of photosynthesis and thus produce more oxygen than older trees.

For each Christmas tree cut, 2-3 new trees are planted. In the United States, there are approximately one million acres in production for growing Christmas trees. This translates to Oxygen for 18 million people per day.

After Holidays, a Christmas tree has many uses:

1. Place the Christmas tree in the yard for use as a winter bird feeder shelter. Use orange slices and bird food to attract birds, once found you and they will enjoy the rest of the winter season.
2. Christmas trees are biodegradable. The branches can be removed and used as mulch in the garden. The trunk can be chopped for Mulch also.
3. Large quantities of trees make effective sand and soil erosion barriers, especially at beaches.
4. Sunk into fish ponds, trees make excellent refuge and feeding areas.
5. Balled and potted trees can be planted in the yard for added years of enjoyment.

Tree trimming average Guidelines:

Tree Height	# Mini Lights	Garland	Ornaments.
2'	35 – 40	24' x 2"	15
3'	70 – 80	30' x 2"	24
4'	100 – 120	48' x 2"/3"	36
6'	200 – 240	72' x 3"	48

Real Christmas trees are an all-American product, grown in all 50 states, including Alaska & Hawaii.

The Holiday Decorating is endlessThere is a wide assortment of plants that are a part of the Holidays.

MISTLETOE - Mistletoe is native to southeast Missouri, but because forests are rapidly disappearing in the Bootheel, it is not very common. It grows as a parasite in the tops of several hardwood trees. The scientific name Phoradendron translates as “tree thief”, emphasizing the parasitic nature of mistletoe. In Missouri, the most common host trees are sycamore, American elm tupelo and river birch. Although mistletoe is parasitic, it does contain chlorophyll and therefore can produce its own food. It usually is found growing in isolated or edge trees where it receives more sunlight. If you decorate with mistletoe for the holidays, you should be aware that the white berries are poisonous.

POINSETTIA Also a tradition is the Poinsettia. This usually red flowering plant is the Christmas season as the Mum is to Fall. The Poinsettia Euphoria Pulcherrima is native to South Mexico. The Poinsettia derives its name from Joel R. Poissett, an American Ambassador to Mexico in 1825. He introduced to the United States with its scarlet bracts, contrasted with its yellow flower and it has won a special place in everyone’s home now, nationwide. According to (USDA) United States Department of Agriculture, Poinsettias are the number one potted plant grown in the United States and an estimated 56,300,000 poinsettias are sold annually. The plants are grown/sold from Mickys Mini - a miniature table top 2" pot to 4", 6", 8" stock plants, topiary trees, and hanging baskets. Colors can range from the traditional red to white, shades of pink-marble, Jingle Bells, Monet and Peppermint.

Since 1919 stories unconfirmed circulated about the Poinsettia - according to the tale, a 2 year-old child of an army officer stationed in Hawaii died from eating a Poinsettia bract. There was never any medical documentation to back up this story. After years of testing the Poinsettia was exonerated as a poisonous plant. In December 19, 1975, a commission issued a statements

denying (the tale of poisonous plant) she gathered a bouquet of common weeds from the roadside and entered the church. As she approached the altar, her spirits lifted. She forgot the humbleness of her gift as she placed it tenderly at the feet of the Christ Child....and there was a miracle! Pepita's insignificant weeds burst into brilliant bloom. They were called Flores de Noche Buena - Flowers of the Holy Night. We call them poinsettias.

.....**AND THE HISTORY**

The *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, or poinsettia, is native to Mexico. First cultivated by the Aztecs, it was then called *Cuetlaxochitl* and prized by them as a symbol of purity. The poinsettia also had practical value for the Aztecs. They made a crimson dye from the colorful bracts and a fever medicine from the milky latex that drips from poinsettias when they are cut. Seventeenth century Franciscan priests were the first to include poinsettias in their Christmas celebration. They used them in the nativity procession *Fiesta of Santa Pesebre*. The man who introduced poinsettias to the United States was our 1st Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Roberts Poinsett. He had some sent to his home in Greenville, South Carolina in 1825.....and this lovely Christmas flower has since borne his name.

Poinsettia (*Euphorbia Pulcherrima*) are green plants with long-lived bracts (vividly colored leaves) and golden-yellow flowers. A bit of tender loving care and the newer varieties will last longer than ever before! Place in a room where there is sufficient natural light to read fine print. Avoid drafts or excess heat from appliances, radiators or ventilating ducts. Place plant high enough to be away from traffic and out of reach of unmonitored children and animals. Put plant in or on a water-proof container to protect your furnishings. Water plant thoroughly when soil surface is dry to touch. Remember to discard excess water. To prolong bright color of bracts, temperatures should not exceed 72 degrees day or 60 degrees night.

**2008
Children's Garden Club
Calendar**

January 5 th , 2008	Flower Arranging	Baisch & Skinner, Inc. – 2721 LaSalle
February 2 nd , 2008	Terrariums	Sappington Garden Center – 11530 Gravois
Feb 28- March 2	Flower Show & C.G.G	Home & Garden Show – America' Center
March 1 st , 2008	Seeds & Spouts	Sherwood's Forest Nursery & Garden Center 2651 Barrett Station Road
April 5 th , 2008	Planning & Planting Your Garden	For the Garden at Haefner's 6703 Telegraph Road
May 3 rd , 2008	Annuals	Queeny Park Greensfelder Recreation Complex 550 Weidmen Road
June 7 th , 2008	Perennials	Sherwood's Forest Nursery & Garden Center 2651 Barrett Station Road
July 12 th 2008	Summer Bulbs with Jason Delaney	Missouri Botanical Garden 4344 Shaw Blvd.
August 2 nd , 2008		
September 6 - ? 13 , 2008	Lend a Hand - Care for the Land Observe, Explore, and Care for the environment, generally	Sherwood's Caring for the planet we live on. Queeny Park Greensfelder recreation complex 550 Weidmen Road
October 4 th , 2008	The Magic of Fall	For the Garden at Haefner's 6703 Telegraph Road.
November 1 st , 2008	A Fall project	Sherwood's Forest Nursery & Garden Center
December 6 th , 2008	Enjoying the Holiday Decorations	Sherwood's Forest