

Friday's Feature

By

Theresa Friday

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### Decorate for the holidays with materials from your own backyard

Many of us decorate our homes for the holidays and a great source for natural decorative material is your own backyard.

Greenery gathered from your own garden will be far fresher and more aromatic than any that you can buy. You may also have a variety of unusual greenery that would be difficult to find for purchase.

The best greenery for indoor decorations comes from cedar, ivy, pine and holly. Pines, firs and cedars are especially good to use for indoor decoration since they dry out slowly and hold their needles best at warm interior temperatures. They may last for several weeks if properly treated and cared for.

Other greenery to consider includes arborvitae, ligustrum, pittosporum, podocarpus, viburnum, Leyland cypress, nandina and Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*).

When gathering live greenery from your shrubs and trees, remember that you are actually pruning the plants. Consider carefully which branches to cut and which ones to leave.

Distribute the cuts evenly around the plant in order to preserve its natural form.

Use clean, sharp pruners to cut branches and immediately put the cut ends into water until ready to use. Crushing the ends of woody stems allows them to take in more water. And soaking the cuttings in water overnight allows the greenery to absorb the maximum amount of water. Commercial sprays are available that can be used to provide some fire resistance.

Never place fresh greenery near heat sources, such as space heaters, heater vents or sunny windows. Keep greenery away from candles and fireplaces. If you use lights near your green arrangements, make sure that



**Birch limbs in glass vases with amaryllis, birds, cones, evergreens, cinnamon sticks on a 12' wide mantel. Photo by Pat Friday**

they stay cool, and if outside, that they are rated for exterior use.

Check your decorations every couple of days for freshness. If the greenery becomes dry, either replace or remove the dry portions. Make sure to discard dry greenery appropriately to prevent a fire hazard.

Also look for bright berries, decorative cones or pods. Attractive seed pods make great additions to dried arrangements. Look for magnolia and pine cones, sweet gum balls, tallow tree seeds, acorns, pecans (these can be glued into clusters with other nuts) and many others you can find in your yard.



**Small holes into the mullions of the window frame, then screw on the birch limbs. Lichen, tallow berry, cones and birds are put on with glue gun. Photo by Pat Friday.**

The leafless branches of deciduous trees are excellent to use in dried arrangements. Try using branches of oak, sweet gum, crape myrtle and winged elm.

Be aware, however, that some popular plants used in holiday decorating can present poisoning hazards for small children or pets. Poisonous berries are found on holly plants, yews, mistletoe, ivy plants, Jerusalem cherry, and crown of thorns. The pearly white berries of mistletoe are particularly toxic. Keep all these plants out of the reach of children and curious pets.

When decorating this holiday season, be creative, and use what you have at hand. The items you can use are as common as the holly bushes in your front yard, or as simple as wild grasses, bare branches or clusters of berries. These materials are versatile, so use your imagination--create something beautiful out of your homegrown materials.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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