



Holiday decorations from the Garden

by Patty Weeks, Master Gardener

As I was wandering my neighborhood this morning I realized what a great variety of materials for Holiday decorating are available in nature all around us and for very little cost. I noticed many beautiful trees - maples, redbuds, and firs - with leaves in various colors of gold, red, and green - just the colors of Christmas. Drought tolerant shrubs like nandina, holly, and toyon all have beautiful berries at this time of year. It got me to thinking about decorating my house for the holidays. These ideas are probably not new to you but reminders of what a wonderful bounty of color we have in our Central Valley gardens. It is so easy to add beauty and a touch of nature to our homes absolutely free of charge.



I have two large Valley Oaks in my yard - The official "City Tree" of Visalia. I gathered a variety of acorns from them, found bright red and green Fresno chili peppers in my vegetable garden, some mint and white snowberry balls, walnuts and pomegranate berries from a neighbor's trees, and lemon scented geranium leaves. I chopped up pieces of greenery from a pine tree, sliced up some orange peel and tossed all the items into a clear glass bowl for a fragrant potpourri.

If you enjoy succulents and have a collection, their interesting individual leaf shapes and combinations of textures and colors combined into a low bowl make wonderful additions to a bookcase shelf. I used individual leaves from Kalanchoe, Christmas cactus, jade, cotyledon, crassula and several other varieties. Many succulents have leaves with green centers and red edging - perfect colors for this time of year. Tuck a couple of bright shiny ornaments next to the bowl for some extra pizzaz.



Lay large bundles of fresh cinnamon sticks tied together with a bright Holiday ribbon and some greenery on an end table under a lamp. The warmth of the lamp will set off the aroma of the cinnamon sticks and add fragrance to your home for weeks.

Magnolia leaves are so magnificent at this time of year and they hold up well even if you spray them with paint. I use metallic silver or gold to make the leaves really stand out in a wreath. Layer them on top of fir branches, tie it all together with a huge red, green and gold wire bow, add a large ornament and hang this swag on your front door to welcome guests.

You see all kinds of fake lemons, apples, pomegranates and other fruits for sale in department stores. Just gather a selection of the real thing for free and layer them in a tall glass jar. I love the look of green and red apples in this season. Tuck a few sprigs of fir or pine into the layers or even tiny ornaments to add a festive touch. You could also add a small set of battery operated lights to the jar.



Collect small pine cones and a branch of red berries, tie to a bit of mistletoe with a small ribbon and hang over a doorway to encourage a Christmas kiss.

You can also make inexpensive gift baskets using a variety of nuts - almonds, walnuts, pecans - and a variety of dried fruit and raisins or olives that are grown in our area. Include a jar of homemade jam or a cheese ball for a healthy treat.

Inexpensive nutcrackers or cheese spreaders are available at most discount stores and would make a darling addition to this gift.

We are so lucky to live in this area with its bountiful variety of trees, shrubs, flowers, vegetables, fruits and nuts. Let's not forget to appreciate our local flora and surroundings when celebrating and decorating for this joyous season. Happy (and naturally beautiful) Holidays from the Tulare/Kings Master Gardeners!



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