

Decorating from the Garden

By Sharon Wentz, Master Gardener

The holiday season is here! It was this time of the year, when I was still teaching 6th grade, that I would develop a twitch in my left eye. It was a not-so-gentle reminder that there was so much to do and little time in which to do it! Plus, it was dark at 4:30 giving one the panicked impression that there really was no time left at the end of the school day. The answer to both the panic and the lack of time is to go outside! Truly, if you can wait to decorate your home for the holidays until closer to December 25 and want to save some money as well, go outside. There in your yard is the answer to a beautiful holiday home.

We, in California, are so lucky to be surrounded by evergreens and berries that are perfect for decorating for the holidays. The key is cutting the greenery as close as possible to December 25 if you want them to look fresh. However, I have cut greens and left them on the mantle for weeks. They do become brittle and somewhat of a fire hazard, though. Currently, I have a basket of *Nandina domestica* (Heavenly Bamboo) berries that are probably over four years old! Berries, on their own, are fine dried and last as long as one is willing to put up with dusty berries! (Photo: peppertree berries with nandina)



To cover a mantle or tabletop with festive berries, think of *pyracantha*, *cotoneaster glaucophyllus*, rose hips or, of course, holly (*ilex aquafolium*). A warning, these and any other shrubbery you might wish to bring into your home should be kept out of the reach of children who are apt to put things in their mouths and pets who, unfortunately, always put things in their mouths! Cornell University has an excellent website listing poisonous plants:

www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants

Almost any evergreen tree or shrub can be used with the berries for home decoration. But sticking to the conifers, evergreens with needles, gives the best holiday appearance. The key is to combine greenery with red berries adding cones and other types of seedpods where desired. One of my favorite combinations is redwood branches (the needled evergreen), nandina berries or rose hips, nandina cuttings and roses. My floribunda rose 'Trumpeter' is always in bloom for the holidays. Its orange red color is perfect for Christmas bouquets! There's really no wrong combination. Select what pleases you. Remember that adding a festive bow can make any arrangement of greens fit for the holidays!