

Holiday Greenery Arrangements



Photos by Beth Weidner.

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November 24, 2005

When the weather turns chilly, and the days grow shorter, sometimes we feel disconnected from the out-of-doors. One way to counteract this feeling is to bring some of the outdoors inside, in the form of arrangements of greenery and other natural materials. The holiday season is a great time to decorate our homes in this fashion, and doing so gives us a real connection to the natural world.

We can just snip a few branches and bring them in to display in a vase, but sometimes branches fall over, or the display looks awkward, so a few simple materials and techniques will allow creating arrangements that are more satisfying.

Cutting Greenery: Be sure to use sharp pruners, and make cuts all the way back to another branch. Condition greenery overnight by soaking in a deep bucket of water, submerging as much of the foliage as possible. Cut branches from plants having contrasting sizes, colors and shapes of leaves. For example, large glossy magnolia leaves will contrast well with the smaller variegated foliage of Chinese ligustrum. Rounded leaves such as camellias will contrast well with spiky foliage of certain bulbs or palm fronds.

Deciding on size and shape of arrangement: First determine where you'll display your arrangement. For a table centerpiece, create a low arrangement, designed to be seen from all sides. For display on an entry table, the arrangement will be seen primarily from one side, so plan for the back to be somewhat flat, although a few sprigs in back will add a dimensional quality. Decide if you want a symmetrical shape, whether you want something upright and tall, low and spreading, or a triangular, round or curving shape. Twin arrangements may be made for each end of a mantel, designed to "face" each other.

Containers and mechanics: For best results, a variety of mechanics to hold the stems may be used. Balled up chicken wire, a floral "frog", or "oasis" wettable foam (available in crafts stores), will keep stems in place.

Containers should be about one third the height of the overall finished size of your arrangement, and should be waterproof. If using “oasis” (not to be confused with “sahara” foam, for dried flower arrangements), soak according to directions, and affix into the container so that a few inches protrude above the rim. Use waterproof tape to secure the foam to the container. Some stems will be stuck into the “oasis” from the side, or at a slight angle upward, in order to hide the foam. You can make the arrangement more pleasing by allowing some foliage to drape down over the lip of the container.

Making the Arrangement: At this point, be bold! Let your imagination run wild – play – experiment! If working with beautiful greenery, you can’t go too far wrong. A few tips will help: Use foliage of a heavier visual weight, such as dark green magnolia, at the base of the arrangement, and lighter, fluffier foliage to create the overall lines. It usually is best to establish the lines of the arrangement first, and then fill in to (mostly) hide the mechanics. Avoid having a bottom layer of one thing, a middle layer of another and a third layer of something else; instead blend all the materials together into a three dimensional array. Work with odd numbers of stems, and use no more than three to five different types of greenery. Leave some spaces, and incorporate those into your design. Enjoy creating natural decorations by bringing a refreshing bit of the outdoors into your home this holiday season.

(This can be placed in a Utility Box:)

For inspiration, come to Camellia Christmas at Maclay Gardens State Park on Friday, December 2nd, and see the Maclay House all decked out in holiday greenery. The event runs from 6 to 9 p.m. , and features carolers and luminaria throughout the park. Cookies and hot cider will be served. A greenery arranging workshop will be held on Wednesday, December 8th for those who would like instruction. For reservations, call 487-4115, as class size is limited.

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