

Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly



Photos by Beth Weidner and Ginger Nichols: Cast iron plant, pittosporum, magnolia, and dogwood are among common plants that can be used in holiday greenery arrangements.

Beth Weidner is Park Manager at Alfred B. Maclay Gardens State Park and a member of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee, <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/>

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The holiday season is a great time to bring in armloads of fresh-cut greenery to decorate our homes. We can snip a few branches and put them in a vase, but using a few simple materials and techniques may give happier results.

Cutting and Conditioning Greenery: When cutting branches, always cut at the junction of the branch with the main stem. Use sharp pruning shears. Choose a variety of plants having contrasting shapes, colors or sizes of leaves. Combine glossy Southern magnolia with airy pine, rounded camellia leaves with spiky palm fronds, and variegated hydrangea with deep green boxwood. Condition greenery by soaking it in a deep bucket of water for several hours or overnight, submerging as much of the foliage as possible.

Design Considerations: First decide where your arrangement will go. For a table centerpiece you may want a low arrangement, designed to be seen from all sides. For an entry table or mantel the arrangement will be seen from one side so the back may 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 S-curved shape. Your foliage and container will inspire your creation so don't over-think it!

Containers and mechanics: Lots of creative containers can be used, from an old boot to a formal urn, or anything in between that will hold water (or hide another water-tight vessel). The container should be about one-third the overall height of the finished arrangement. There are lots of materials used to support the greenery so that the branches will stay in the position you want them, rather than falling over. These are known as the

“mechanics” of the arrangement, and include such things as balled up chicken wire, a floral “frog”, or simply a grid over the mouth of a vase made with waterproof green floral tape. “Oasis” wettable foam is available in crafts stores and is great for keeping stems in place. If using oasis (not to be confused with “sahara” foam, for dried flower arrangements), soak it according to directions, cut it to fit the container so that a few inches extend above the rim. Some stems will be stuck into the foam from the side, or at a slight upward angle, hiding the foam and giving a more natural look by allowing some foliage to drape down over the lip of the container. Depending upon the size and weight of the stems, oasis may need to be coupled with a covering of chicken wire to provide extra support and waterproof tape is used to secure the foam and wire to the container.

Making the Arrangement: Start by choosing several stems to establish the outline and size of the arrangement. Use foliage of a heavier visual weight, such as dark green magnolia or a cluster of bold variegated leaves, at the base of the arrangement. Avoid creating distinct layers of different types of foliage by inserting a few stems of each throughout, blending all 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. Most of all, make it fun by having a playful attitude! You really can’t go wrong when using beautiful fresh greenery to bring a welcome breath of the outdoors into your home this holiday season.

(The following can be placed in a Utility Box, please:)

For inspiration, come to Camellia Christmas at Maclay Gardens State Park on Friday, December 5th to see the Maclay House all decked out in holiday greenery, thanks to the Tallahassee Garden Club Flower Show Judges. The event runs from 6 to 9 p.m., and features carolers and luminaria through the Gardens. Cookies and hot cider will be served and Santa will make an appearance. A greenery arranging workshop will be held on Thursday, December 11th from 10 a.m. until noon, for those who would like instruction. For reservations, call 487-4115, as class size is limited.

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