

Easy Holiday Decorating

Get Into The Season With These Simple Tips

BY JEN MULSON

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By now, surely somebody in the neighborhood has flipped the switch and set off a chain of holiday lights and Santas and reindeer inflatables.

Whether you grumble or bubble with delight at this time of year, it's time to dust off the boxes of decorations.

"It's adding color to the winter. We're already sick of the doldrums and gray skies," said Rich Schell, owner of Rich Design Homes. "I look at Christmas in several ways. It's religious, and it's also full of celebration for family and friends and being with people you enjoy, opening your home and cleaning and decorating."

A few experts suggest some easy ways to get your home into the holiday spirit.

"It's an ushering out of a year, and looking to a new beginning of a new season," Schell said. "It's almost a celebration of making it one more year."

CHRISTMAS TREES

Walk into many homes around Christmas and there stands the mighty Christmas tree.

"I recommend the native white fir," said Debbie Bradley, co-owner of Harding Nursery. White firs are conifer trees with flat needles 2-3 inches long that are soft to the touch. They have light-colored bark, symmetrical branches and a conical shape that make it a perfect looking evergreen tree, according to the website coloradotrees.org. "They last really well," Bradley said.

Her tip? Don't let the water run out.

"If it runs out, and it (the tree) can't pull up any water," she said, "it starts to seal up at the bottom."

A freshly cut fir tree can last from the beginning of December until March, Schell said. He suggests buying one from a garden center, rather than a grocery store parking lot.

Bradley also likes Noble and Fraser firs. Nobles are deep green and have sturdy branches and needles that aren't too sharp — perfect for hanging ornaments. Fraser firs have 1-inch, soft, silvery-green needles with lots of space between the branches.

The tree decorating process doesn't have to be labor intensive.

"I am always in the less is more



PHOTO: METRO CREATIVE GRAPHICS

category," Schell said. "Get a live tree and put all one color ornaments on it for a beautiful modern look. That would create a major impact, versus mismatched ones (ornaments) all over the tree."

Theme trees are also a popular alternative, and one that allows for plenty of creativity. A few examples found on Pinterest, a content sharing service online, include a candy tree, with big lollipop ornaments, gingerbread houses tucked into the branches and pink and white decorations. There's the fake white tree with a musical instrument theme, including lots of hanging gold instrument ornaments and bows.

White fir trees also offer a healthy space between branches for lights near the trunk and plenty of room for ornaments to hang, Schell said.

If it's an apartment being decorated, and there isn't much space, a small tree is another option. Bradley likes to decorate little potted spruce trees, about 3 or 4 feet tall, and place them around the home. Rosemary trees in 4-inch pots can also substitute.

"I just think they're cute," she said.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTING AND OUTDOOR DECORATIONS

The numerous strings of holiday lights almost make up for the lack of daylight in the winter months, though the electric bill could make you see your own stars.

Neil Fairley, owner of We Hang Christmas Lights, has seen some extremely expensive bills during this time of year. One customer spent \$12,000, another forked out \$15,000 and a homeowners association once spent \$25,000, he said.

"The great thing about lights, if you're a business owner," he said, "is if you have a Christmas party at your home, it's a tax write-off."

The lighting doesn't have to be complicated, he said. Just outline the front of the house with lights, doing both levels if you have them. Use LED bulbs if you can, he said. They're a bit pricier than incandescent bulbs, but the reduction on the utility bill will make up for it.

If it's an apartment, string lights around the railings, or around an outdoor tree or bush near the porch area. And decide if your family is an all-white lights or colored lights type before you start.

"It brings the Christmas spirit,"

Fairley said. "It's festive looking."

Inflatables and large wire decorations are also an option. Large home improvement stores, such as Home Depot and Lowe's, sell inflatables for the yard. Wire shapes of reindeers, Santa and angels come with lights attached.

Safety first, of course.

"Make sure you calculate the amount of lights you are plugging in to not trip a breaker," Fairley said. "You don't want to blow a fuse. Make sure to secure ladders properly. We've had cases of people stuck on roofs. They call us to finish the job for them."

FLOWERS, PLANTS AND BOUGHS

There's no need to get fancy, just pick up some seasonal plants and flowers.

Robin Boutilier, perennials manager at Good Earth Garden Center, likes the elegant Paperwhite Narcissus and the bright, cheery reds of amaryllis plants.

"They're easy. They're kind of a bouquet," Boutilier said, "although amaryllis can be left potted, and moved outside in the spring. It will bloom again around July."

Mother Nature is also a reliable source for creating inexpensive decorations. Go outside, trim off some pine tree branches and gather some pine cones. Schell likes to fill attractive vases or bowls with pine cones.

Take the boughs and decorate the mantel, Bradley said, or put a candle inside a lantern and set the branches around the outside of it.

Wreaths are a staple during the holiday months. Find one with a 12-inch diameter, and use it as a table centerpiece with a candle or bowl in the center, Boutilier said.

A simple garland can be draped around doors, fireplaces and decks.

Luminarias are an easy way to lend a festive quality to an outdoor walkway. Paper bags are filled with sand and a votive candle. Luminarias can also be made of tin, glass, fish-bowls and cardboard carryout containers. Many stores carry electric luminarias, which feature plastic or paper "bags" and an electric light. A 10-pack LumaBase is \$32.40 at kohls.com.

Line them up along the sidewalk leading up to the front door or decorate the porch with a few.

ORNAMENTS

Think outside the tree when it comes to ornaments.

If there isn't any room on a dinner table, hang some ornaments from the chandelier, Schell said, or safely hang some votive and tealight candles and do a candlelit dinner party.

"Instead of feeling like you've got to hang an ornament, fill a bowl or tall glass cylinder of balls all the way to the top and create a 24-inch vase with balls," Schell said. "It's beautiful on the dining table. You can do it without flowers."

On Gardening

Poinsettia Pals Create Stunning Holiday Style

BY NORMAN WINTER

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Just down the sidewalk from my office, in our Garden for All Abilities, Picasso poinsettias and dusty millers are creating a Kodak moment for visitors. The Poinsettia Pal concept is now about 7 years old and it appears we are only limited by our imagination. The impetus for this companion craze for poinsettias was the debut of the Diamond Frost euphorbia. It is still both unbeatable and underused, creating the illusion that, when paired, the cheerful red bracts are actually resting on a bed of ice crystals.

The winter has been mild in Savannah, Ga., and our combinations being grown outside are most striking. Picasso is a red poinsettia than indeed looks as though the artist himself had carefully brushed creamy white on the bracts. The silver-leaved dusty miller is really a foil helping the poinsettia to show out even more.

Though we are growing it outside it could be easily duplicated in a large bowl or container indoors for the holidays. A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to see another showy planting that featured much the same concept, but used a selection of poinsettias with nar-



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The Picasso poinsettia looks hand painted and is even showier thanks to the silver leaved dusty miller.

row pink bracts and Silver Spike helichrysum.

In another section of our Garden for All Abilities we are using Carolina Sapphire, a blue Arizona cypress selection, in partnerships with red poinsettias in one bed and with white selections nearby. You can easily duplicate the look indoors, with a small Arizona cypress, a rosemary topiary, or even a small pinion pine. By all means don't forget the Norfolk Island pine as a companion.

An obvious consideration

is to use other Christmas plants as partners. White kalanchoes, with their distinctive, succulent-looking leaves, can provide all the contrast you need. But one of the showiest partnerships comes from combining the poinsettia with cyclamen. Cyclamen comes in several shades of red, pink, white, and even purple all with extraordinarily beautiful variegated foliage.

This is an example of thinking outside the box or stretching the horticultural comfort zone. Cyclamen like

it cool, and poinsettias like it warm. Go ahead and combine them, remembering that you aren't going to be a greenhouse grower but a floral interior designer. You only want to create a show until a few days or so after Christmas. This partnership will work for the period of time you need.

No matter whether you choose a traditional usage for your poinsettia or create a dazzling combination, water will play an important role. If you are going with the traditional enjoyment of your poinsettias this probably means you are keep the foil wrapper. These wrappers can hold water so make sure your poinsettia does not sit actually submerged.

Whether you are using a wrapper, or creating a poinsettia partnership that is the envy of neighbors, don't forget to water. With all of the shopping, Christmas parties and business of the season you will want to keep the plants moist to the touch. Touching is the key, when the surface is dry to the touch, water until it runs freely out the drainage hole in the container.

Poinsettias are extraordinary beautiful Christmas plants, so use them boldly in all areas of your home from the centerpiece on the table, to the family room and guest

bedrooms. Make this the year you add some poinsettia partners to make your holiday arrangements even more stunning.

Norman Winter is director of the Coastal Georgia Botanical Gardens at the Historic Bamboo Farm, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, and author of "Tough-as-Nails Flowers for the South" and "Captivating Combinations Color and Style in the Garden."

Harvest Of The Month Grant Available

BROOKINGS — Grants to encourage South Dakota children to eat healthier are now available thanks to a collaborative effort between SDSU Extension and the South Dakota Department of Health.

The grants will provide resources so children can taste and actively participate in education about a variety of fruits and vegetables.

The collaborators are investing in a team approach which includes local schools, parents and community grocery stores. The Harvest of the Month (HOM) mini-grant offered for spring and summer of 2014 will be open to schools, after school programs, preschools and summer programs.

Agencies may apply for a grant based on the total enrollment of the classes who will experience HOM: 0 to 100 children will receive \$125,101 to 200 children will receive \$250,201 to 400 children will receive \$500.

Mini-grant requirements include: using a team approach, providing education and tasting experiences on four fruits and four vegetables using free HOM materials, conducting a pre- and post-survey, and following 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans in samples. Funds may be used to purchase fruits and vegetables for lessons and tasting experiences, nutrition education materials and child-friendly tools for fruit and vegetable preparation.

In an effort to involve grocers in promoting fruits and vegetables, the grant will also provide print resources for Harvest of the Month/ Pick it! Try it! Like it! signs and recipe cards for the first 10 grocers who agree to be a part of their school's HOM mini-grant plan and will provide these complementary materials for shoppers in their stores.

Free downloads for the materials can be found at the following links: HOM materials - <http://www.sdhharvestofthemoth.com/>; HOM/Pick it! Try it! Like it! materials - <http://igrow.org/healthy-families/health-and-wellness/pick-it-try-it-like-it/>.

Applications are accepted today until all available funds are committed. To download an application, visit the HealthySD website, <http://healthysd.gov/Schools/default.aspx> or the SD Harvest of the Month website, <http://www.sdhharvestofthemoth.com/>. Notification of grant approval will be within one week of receipt. Implementation may begin immediately upon receipt of the contract. Final summary and evaluations are due Aug. 15, 2014.

If you have any questions, contact Karlys Wells, SDSU Extension EFNEP/FNP Program Associate at karlys.wells@sdstate.edu.

