Winter Greens

As Christmas approaches, you have a wonderful opportunity to express yourself by decorating with winter greens. At the same time you can help to make your home take on a truly festive spirit. Christmas arrangements are not hard to make. You can catch on to the simple principles quickly, and in a short time your results may surprise everyone, even yourself!

What you’ll need:
Most of the materials you need are inexpensive or free for the asking in many sections of the state. But get permission before cutting branches or fruits on someone else’s land!

Plant Materials:
Evergreen branches are most important. It’s surprising how much material goes into even small arrangements. If you have a cool, moist spot free of drafts for storage, you can start gathering greens around Thanksgiving. They can also be bought, usually in bundles, from garden stores and many outlets selling Christmas trees. In any case, keep them away from heat, wind and sun.

The most common evergreens include balsam fir (the most common), spruce (needles don’t last as long as fir), white pine (nice graceful texture), and hemlock (needles drop in dry air). Other less common evergreens include white cedar or arborvitae, red cedar and other wild junipers (watch for sharp needles; some varieties have blue berries), broad lead evergreens (rhododendron, holly, mountain laurel lend nice contrast). You may also need to prune your cultivated evergreens, so why not do it now and use the trimmings? One caution with Yew or Taxus; all plant parts are poisonous, especially the attractive red berries.

Other plant parts you can use for interest and to give arrangements that New England “look” include cones (all types from small hemlock to long spruce cones; some spray paint them for a little extra punch), berries (red or orange include our native winterberry, sumac, crabapples, mountain ash, hawthorne; blue include arrowwood, nannyberry, junipers; yellow includes some crabapples), and whole plants such as grasses or pods.

Artificial decorations:
Artificial berries, toys, animals such as birds and balls are some of the hundreds of attractive ornaments that can be added to the greens of decorations. Many kinds of bells afford a variety of opportunity. Those that twinkle are particularly good for doors or where moved by the wind. Red ribbons are the most popular, although hundreds of other styles and color combinations are available at Christmas shops. If using outdoors, make sure the ribbon is rated for that use. Keep the width in proportion to the size of the arrangement.

Check to see if your ribbon harmonizes with berries or other decorations. Reds and orange-reds, such as bittersweet berries, seldom combine as well.

The Basics:
Most designs need something for a base. Wreaths can be made on wire coat hangers bent into a circle, no. 9 wire similarly bent, or wreath frames of wire, foam or straw. Rope makes a good base for garlands or roping. Florist foam, available at florists and many Christmas craft shops, serves as a base for arrangements. Foam comes in “bricks” which can be cut into any shape to fit any size container, and it holds many times its weight in water.

Other essentials include a pair of pruners, clippers or utility scissors. Florist picks (like hair pins) hold greens to straw bases. Florist wire is thin and green, coming in different widths and in strands or on a spool. It is essential for holding everything together such as cones to wreaths, greens to frames or rope, and decorations to walls.

**Getting started:**
The range of Christmas arrangements reaches far beyond what you may usually think possible. Don’t hesitate to try out new ideas. Christmas craft magazines are a good source of ideas. Remember, you can take anything you don’t like apart and start again. Just keep in mind that whatever you make should be in proportion and harmonize with the surroundings.

**Wreaths and Roping:**
The basic unit for making either is individual branches or bundles of them. Simply cut small branch pieces 4 to 6 inches in length from main branches and wire or pin them directly to frames. Or you can wire several together into a bundle and then wire the bundle to the base. Overlay one branch or bundle over the cut ends of the last to hide them and the wire. Proceed down the rope or around the frame in this manner. Finally, once the greens are secured, add a bow and few ornaments, cones, or berries for interest.

**Table Arrangements:**
Start with a wet block of florist form either by itself or cut to fit another container such as a basket (make sure the basket is waterproof or else put a saucer under the wet foam). Next place sprigs of green in the foam, followed by ornaments such as berries and artificial decorations. Berries can be wired to a florist pick (like a toothpick) which is then stuck in the foam. Use design principles here as if you were arranging flowers.

**Other Arrangements:**
Many other decorations are possible using wire or Styrofoam bases in the shapes of candy canes, cones or balls among others. Simply use the above procedures and your own creativity!

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