

Department of Horticulture

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service · West Lafayette, IN

Holiday Greens

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You can say "Happy Holidays" with evergreen decorations you make yourself! Enhance your indoor or outdoor holiday decor or make attractive gifts. Wreaths, swags, balls, garlands, and table arrangements can all be made at home with a few simple materials and the following tips.

Choosing Greens

Cone bearing or needle evergreens are commonly used in holiday decorations. You can purchase greens or carefully prune them from your home landscape. Some of the most suitable types are:

Balsam fir	Douglas fir	False cypress
Austrian pine	Yew	Red pine
White pine	Red cedar	Juniper
Scots nine		

Avoid hemlock and spruce for indoor use since they drop their needles quickly.

Broad-leaved evergreens are commonly used as holiday greens where they grow as hardy landscape plants. Holly and boxwood are excellent choices. Others include barberry, Oregon holly-grape, English ivy and rhododendron.

Special care should be taken when harvesting this type of material not to damage the ornamental value of the plant.

Materials

In addition to greens, assembly of holiday decorations will require most of the following materials:

- · Pruning shears, knife, or old scissors
- Wire, No. 9 (wreath hoops); No. 22 or 24 and/or strong twine (binding greens); and No. 20 (binding accents)
- · Wood pieces
- · Hobby or florist's foam
- Sphagnum moss
- · Cones, berried branches, ribbon, candles, etc.

Wreathmaking

Frame

The first requirement is a frame. Frames can be purchased from florist or craft and hobby stores, or you can construct your own.

To make one, use No. 9 wire or a heavy-duty wire coat hanger; or intertwine slender shoots of plants such as willow, privet, lilac, grape, or wisteria. The frame should be formed into a circle with the ends overlapped and bound with strong twine or binding wire (No. 24). If the plant shoots are too short to make the complete circle, bind them together with the slender tip of one overlapping the heavier basal end of the other (Figure 1). It is important to bind the frame firmly and that it be rigid since it must support the entire weight of the greens.

The size of the frame will determine the size of the finished wreath. A 10-15 inch diameter frame will make an average sized wreath.

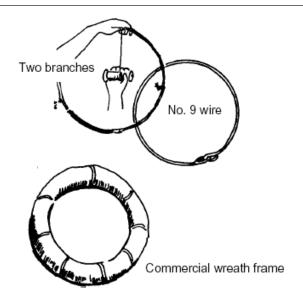


Figure 1. Wreath frame construction from No. 9 wire or wooden branches.

Binding

Before any branches are bound to the frame, the binding wire must be securely fastened to the frame. Then you are ready to add greens.

Use foliage pieces sized appropriately for the finished wreath. The most common beginner's mistake is using pieces of greens that are too long. This results in a shaggy, uneven and often spindly appearance. Use 4- to 6-inch long pieces for a 15-inch wreath frame. Cut all the greens before you begin binding. For bulky needle types, strip some needles from the stem bases.

Lay three or four sprigs along the frame with the tips facing backwards and the cut ends forward. Bind the cut ends with two or three turns of the wire (Figure 2). Then position the next set of sprigs so that it overlaps the first like shingles on a roof, and fasten again. Be sure to pull the binding wire tight each time. Continue the procedure until the frame is completed. Do not skimp on greens.

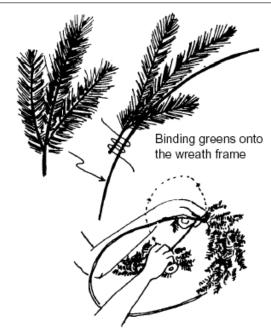


Figure 2. Binding greens onto the wreath frame. Bind individual sprigs, but place them in clusters of 3 or 4.

To finish attaching greens, hold back the first sprigs and bind the last bundle. This prevents binding down the tops of the first sprigs. Then secure the binding wire to the frame.

To complete the wreath, add trimmings and accent decorations such as cones, berries, ornaments, bells, or ribbons. Attach wire to each decoration separately and then wire each one to the frame (Figure 3). Don't overdo these accents; let the beauty of the greens dominate the design.



Figure 3. Decorative accents and trimmings should not be overdone to allow the beauty of the greens to dominate the design.

For sparkle, you might want to spray the wreath with glitter paint or powdered snow. Any such application should be made to the greens only. Thus it should be done before trimmings or accent decorations are added. You can improvise your own glitter by using plaster of Paris, white paint, or white shoe polish. For a crystallized effect use a saturated solution of Epsom salts, or for a snowy look, use a heavy lather of whipped soap chips.

Swags

A swag is an artistic bunching of one or more evergreen branches. Swags are one of the easiest and most effective decorations for a door.

You can make a simple swag by wiring three or four 18to 30-inch-long branches together, tips down. Decorate with cones, ribbons, bells, seed pods, ornaments, gourds, toy musical instruments or fruits.

To make a shaped swag (for instance, an "S"), bend No. 9 wire into the desired shape; then wire on evergreen branches as you would in making a wreath, and add decorations to complete it.

A large bow is usually fastened near the top.

Festoons or Roping (Garlands)

Festoons or roping are made with the same binding method as wreaths except the greens are bound to a heavy, flexible cord of strong hemp or clothesline. While binding the greens, fasten the cord to a hook or a doorknob so that it can be stretched taut. Be sure the binding wire is firmly secured to the cord so that it cannot unravel.

Evergreen sprigs are cut 3 to 4 inches long and arranged in small bundles on both the front and back of the cord for a rope appearance. Be sure you make the cord the required length since cutting usually results in the unraveling of the binding. For long lengths, it is often advisable to prepare several short lengths and then bind them together.

Table Centerpieces

A table centerpiece should be planned well in advance to fit the table and its intended use. Centerpieces function as dividers at dining tables or as accents on coffee or side tables. Simple base shapes such as rectangles, circles, squares or triangles are most pleasing. Usually the height should be kept below the eye level of the people at the table. Plan any candle arrangement before beginning construction.

Small centerpieces can be made in low bowls filled with moss or florist foam. Sprays of cones, berries, or evergreens can be arranged in a bowl using a pincushion holder.

To construct your own centerpiece base, cut a wooden board to the desired size and shape. The dimensions should allow for the evergreen foliage to extend about 6 inches beyond the base all around. Drill appropriate holes for candles as desired. Place moist sphagnum peat moss on the board, wrap with waxed paper or aluminum foil and bind firmly with wire (Figure 4). Hobby or builder's foam may also be used as a base material without moss. However, this type of construction will cause the greens to dry out more quickly.

Sphagnum moss

Wire

Waxed paper or aluminum foil

Figure 4. Prepare a centerpiece base by securing moss to a base board. Then insert cut ends of greens into the moist moss.

Next, sharpen short pieces of the desired evergreen foliage and stick into the moss or foam. Start at the outer edge with evergreen sprigs 6 to 7 inches long. Place them close together to cover the edge of the base. Continue to build the mound with shorter pieces of evergreen until the base is entirely covered.

Candles should be added next. Place them in the holes that were drilled in the base earlier. Note that candles present a very real fire hazard in close proximity to cut greens. They should be lighted only when someone will be in the room. Tall candles, at least 15 to 18 inches high, are generally safer than shorter ones.

Evergreen Ball

The evergreen ball is a traditional decoration which is commonly hung in a hallway, archway, or entrance porch.

Start with a plastic foam ball about 5 inches in diameter, or prepare a ball-shaped base by wrapping moistened sphagnam peat moss with twine. A moss base must be very tightly wrapped and firm. Secure a piece of stout cord or No. 22 wire to the ball as a hanger. Do not use wire with a foam ball as it will cut the foam.

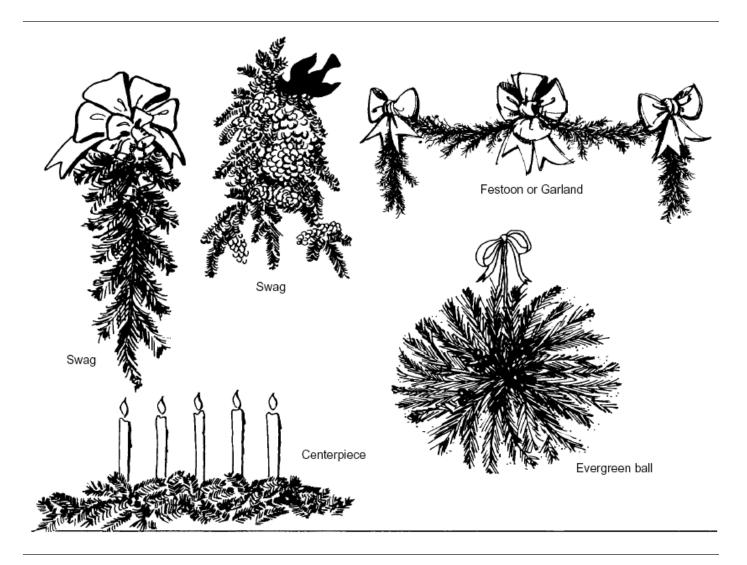
Use evergreen sprigs 4 inches long. Sharpen the stems if necessary. If the stems are soft, bind several onto a wooden pick and push the pick into the ball. Usually about 100 bunches of white pine are needed. Boxwood also is a favorite material.

Trim the evergreen ball with ribbons, mistletoe, or holly.

Fire Retardant and Preservative Sprays

Evergreen decorations can be a fire hazard. As a flame retardant, spray your decorations with a mixture of 4 tablespoons boric acid and 9 tablespoons borax dissolved in 2 quarts of water. An alternative mixture is 5 tablespoons borax and 4 tablespoons Epsom salts dissolved in 2 quarts of water. However, the best precaution is to remove or replace greens when they loose their freshness.

To help prolong freshness, sprays are available to minimize moisture loss from cut greens. Plastic or lacquer hobby sprays are one alternative. Products made from plant resins are also available. However, they can make the foliage sticky and should be used only on decorations for outdoors or those out of reach indoors. All are somewhat effective at keeping greens fresh longer.



For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

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