



Sowing Seeds of Knowledge Reaps Conservation with Beauty

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December is here! Each of us has our own way to celebrate the holidays. The garden is pretty much put to bed though the evergreens provide seasonal color. This issue of *Sowing Seeds of Knowledge*....will cover some ideas for using horticulture available on our own property or *appropriate* areas to ‘harvest’ a bit of color to brighten our homes.

Seasonal Decorations Available in the Landscape

To make a Thanksgiving table arrangement for a garden club program, I surveyed our property for some suitable evergreens to use as a design base. Some of the discoveries were worrisome. The drought has caused the foliage on the trees to be very dry. Major conditioning was necessary to use these branches indoors. Is this a solvable problem? Here are some suggestions—it would be interesting to learn some of your techniques

- ✿ Carry a large clean bucket of warm water or a large plastic garbage sack containing a very wet towel with you (Basically anything to add a some moisture for the cuttings prior to really conditioning them for display)
 - Make the cuttings from an appropriate part of the tree
 - Place the cut end of the branch in bucket of water!
- ✿ Collect the cuttings in your work space
 - An outdoor table close to a hose bib is ideal but the kitchen sink or the bathtub (!) is also a possibility—in other words easily available water makes life easier for this task
 - Using SHARP loppers/sequesters make a DIAGONAL CUT at least one inch from the original cutting

- Cut any damaged needles/leafs plus 2 or 3 inches of bottom foliage from the branch
 - Make this cut under water if possible
 - Immediately submerge the whole branch into the warm water—it is amazing how quickly a plant can close its ‘air lock’ when exposed to air
 - Place the bucket in a cool, low light area
- Allow the branches to ‘condition’ in this water for several hours before using them in designs or decorations
- (If using a live Christmas tree always make a fresh cut prior to putting it in its stand—most stands have receptacles for water, use them!)
- ✿ Now you are ready to design; what are some ideas for keeping the foliage/inflorescence hydrated?
 - Wet foam bricks—let soak in warm water until completely saturated (use in a water proof container for your design)
 - Glass or rock pebbles—place in the bottom of the container to support the stems
 - Chicken wire—form to fit the top of the container
 - Waterproof tape—make a grid of tape on the top of the container
- ✿ Design—this is a whole other subject (and not my best skill) but by ‘graduating’ from NGC Flower Show School, Basic Design Courses, and learning about the *Attributes of Design*: beauty, harmony distinction, expression and *Elements of Design*: line, form, light, color, texture, size, space, pattern, and last but not least *Principles of Design*: balance, contrast, dominance, proportion, scale, and rhythm you, too, can learn to make a lovely bouquet! Basic Design Courses and Flower Show School are an offering of NGC and GCG which provide the basic information for improving your skills and Flower Show School has the added interest of a outstanding horticulture curriculum. Contact Joy Zaidan, Flower Show School Chairman for more information. Basic Design Courses information can be learned from Judy McWhorter. I’ve had the privilege of participating in all these courses and consider it one of my most useful experiences learning correct techniques and making good friends throughout all levels of garden club. (Next Sowing Seeds....will include publicity about Gardening Study, Landscape Design School and Environmental Studies)

You may recall last two editions of the Horticulture Edition were submitted on the wrong month infringing on the Landscape Design Edition--it was very embarrassing for me. Dr. Barrett, Landscape Design Editor, requested since I would be doing December that a group of examples be included showing decorations using fresh foliage from the local landscape. (Not his exact words but how I interpreted them) Included are some of personal past Christmas 'designs' including local stuff from the landscape and woods at our home in Pike County. I'm pretty sure that the garland on the door is store bought but the ribbon is a personal addition.



Berries are from Savannah holly tree, with assorted evergreen foliage. Crock is a pre-1860 water container. Assorted hardy succulents in the two flower pots are from the garden the metal cat is a family favorite. He always sports a necktie for the season. All the fresh material was cut from our property



The dining room table with crystal bowl full of pine boughs with a bit of sprayed on 'snow' and berries from the Savannah holly, *Ilex x attenuate*.



A close up of the collection of greenery and berries by the front door. Savannah holly berries last quite well and don't fall from the greenery creating a big mess especially on carpet when used inside the house. Nandina berries are notorious for making a mess plus they are poisonous.

and decorated with various Fresh wreaths are easy to make and thin wire to attach the keep the foliage moving in have carefully conditioned it hazard. Only keep it up for a week or



Wreath made from local evergreens bicycle ornaments. using a wire form foliage. I like to one direction and so as to not be a fire two in the house.



Decorations made from scrap wood and cones from trees. (I think these were from Colorado. Georgia pines just don't have this big a cone but they still make great decorations. The 'trees' are bark cut from fallen deciduous trees and decorated

with a bit of sparkle and a star. A special friend here in Pike County makes them for us. This could not be a simpler mantel arrangement.



The ever present Amaryllis, *Hippeastrum formosissima* is a wonderful plant—just after the season is over the bulb goes in the garden to bloom again for years to come. What a revelation that is to Midwesterner...an amaryllis growing in the garden in early summer!! Be sure to plant yours every year if you are not in the habit of doing so.



This is a favorite of ours. When third son was about 14 years old, and he needed a task, so told him to go out to the woods behind our house and find something to make a crèche for the Nativity Scene—about an hour later this is the crèche he constructed from a fallen tree and some shingles. It has been a part of our Christmas for over 40 years. The figures are from the original crèche which was at least 60 years ago—we needed a new one. The flat rocks are from the shore of Lake Michigan’s Crystal Lake. They are prehistoric and when wet shine like crystal.

Does this information have any usefulness for you? Let’s explore common plants that can offer possible decorative uses for your seasonal use.

- ✿ One of the more common first thoughts would go to whatever type of ‘evergreen’ is growing in your landscape or an appropriate location for collecting

- Conifers are an evergreen cone-bearing tree or shrub such as pine or spruce or fir



- ✿ *Magnolia grandiflora* is the ‘evergreen’ species of Magnolia (there are several deciduous magnolia also—not holiday decoration possibilities)



As you can see the image on the right has all the ‘holiday décor’! What could be better than elegant green leaves and red berries? The berries are not long lasting indoors and can be messy. Outdoors is a more hospitable environment. Also important for



beauty is the brown fuzzy back of the elegant green leaf as in the upper left image with the late spring flower. There are two sizes of leaves—*Magnolia grandiflora* is a very tall tree with large leaves, but there is a ‘dwarf’ version, *Magnolia grandiflora* ‘little gem’ is the smaller version—but it is not a little tree! Just small leaves!

- ✿ Ilex is the botanic name for what is commonly referred to as ‘holly’ *I. attenuate* (Savannah holly), *I. Cornuta* ‘burfordii’, are a few of the berry



bearing species which are very useful for the holidays. *Ilex verticillata* is a deciduous favorite for the wonderful red berries. Burfordii holly is a wonderful shrub/hedge and another one of the plant varieties which has both large and dwarf varieties based primarily on the leaf size not the girth of the bush/tree

❁ *Buxus sempervirens*, commonly referred to as boxwood, is a slow growing elegant shrub which could certainly be used for a gorgeous wreath or added to an arrangement, but I would have a hard time convincing myself to cut the foliage to use which required large amounts of material! There is an alternative!



❁ *Ilex crenata* commonly called Japanese Holly looks similar to *Buxus* and is used extensively in foundation planting. It can be substituted for real boxwood. There are a multitude of species which are hardy faster growing plants with a wide range of uses for holiday decorations.



We have covered a range of green leaf/red berried plants. Now let's consider some other alternatives.

❁ Tree/bush branches make striking Christmas trees! A little glittery paint, a few lightweight ornaments, and/or some fake snow....and a new tree is born. The branch can be small, medium or big size and available from a leafless winter tree.



☀ Conifer cones are in abundance and can be a good incentive for the children to gather and decorate.



☀ Acorns, nuts, tree bark, fruit, ...anything interesting can be spray painted,



I hope this information about *decorating for the holidays* has given you a few ideas which the Happy Gardener is quite sure you can multiply at least a thousand times over. Most importantly be creative, have fun, learn a new technique, experiment and develop an idea to be treasured.

Happy Holidays,

Gail, the Happy Gardener and Amateur Crafter