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Christmas Decorations for Fun or Profit
Michigan State University Extension Service
R. E. Dils, Forestry
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CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

**FOR FUN
or PROFIT**

By R. E. Dils

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE

Cooperative Extension Service

EAST LANSING

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Christmas Decorations for Fun or Profit

By R. E. DILS¹

"Deck the halls with bough of holly" and "'Tis the season to be jolly" are lines from a favorite Christmas carol; but in recent years it has become increasingly difficult to be financially "jolly"—at least after the decorating is finished. Prices of wreaths have skyrocketed; beautiful ready-made centerpieces are available—but expensive; tree ornaments themselves have doubled in price.

Yet spreading the spirit of Christmas, by attractive decorations throughout the whole house, is being done more and more each year.

There seems to be just one way to solve the problem of doing more extensive decorating for less money. Make your own wreaths, centerpieces, or table decorations. Then there is also the possibility that your club or organization may be interested in making such articles on a larger scale as a Christmas fund-raising campaign.

With these factors in mind, we have tried to select only ideas which are simple, practical, and inexpensive—yet novel and attractive. We have stressed the use of materials which are readily obtainable at little cost. Above all, we have tried to present ideas which vary in complexity so that the whole family can take part in the fun.

For example, Dad and Mother may have to do most of the work on the welcoming front-door wreath, but they can turn the making of marshmallow snowmen—used as place card holders on the Christmas dinner table—entirely over to the younger generation. In this way each member of the family can have a part in building Christmas traditions in your house, and contributing to a merrier Christmas for everyone.

¹Assistant Professor of Forestry.

DECORATIVE MATERIALS

GREENERY

In Michigan forests and woodlots the most common kinds of trees which provide greenery for Christmas decorations are red or Norway pine; jack, Scotch, and white pine; balsam fir; white cedar; juniper; and black, white, and Norway spruce. The best of these for indoor decorations are the pines, the firs, and the cedars.



Fig. 1

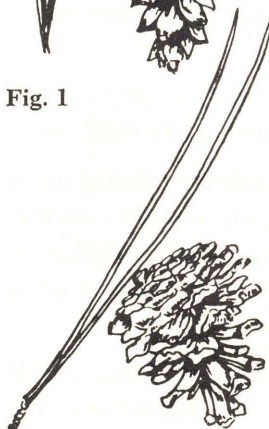


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Both hemlock and the spruces are excellent for exterior wreaths and sprays, but when brought into a warm building they may lose their needles within one week. Of the pines, white pine is the easiest to work with because the stems are thin and the foliage soft and bushy. Juniper provides excellent decorative material, but is difficult to use because of its very sharp-pointed scale-like leaves.

Don't overlook your own lot; perhaps some of your garden and lawn evergreens require trimming. The more favored trees and shrubs providing decorative greenery are Douglas fir, yew, arborvitae, and holly. Trim your evergreens carefully, however. Make cuts with a sharp knife or sharp pruning shears, and make the cut close to the tree limb so that no ugly stub is left.

But remember: Collecting greenery from Federal or State lands is prohibited without the permission of the forester, or conservation officer, in charge.

Also remember that all evergreens should be cut with a sharp knife or shears so that the wounds heal quickly. Proper trimming can improve a tree's appearance and stimulate growth. Trimming in late November or December appears to do no harm to forest or garden evergreens.

The following brief descriptions and illustrations should aid you in identifying the more common evergreen trees found in Michigan.

White pine foliage (Fig. 1) can be identified by its soft, dark blue-green needles which occur in bundles of five. The needles are ordinarily 3 to 4½ inches long. Its cones are rather long and slender and are excellent for decorating.

Red pine needles (Fig. 2) are usually found in bundles of two, and vary from 4 to 6 inches in length. They are dark yellow-green in color, straight, flexible, and break off cleanly when doubled between the fingers.

The needles of jack pine (Fig. 3) are flat, dark yellow-green, about ¾ to 1½ inches long and often twisted. As in the red pine, there are usually two needles per bundle. In Scotch pine, the needles are blue-green and usually in bundles of two. In addition, they vary from 1½ to 3 inches in length and are rather sharp-pointed.

Hemlock (Fig. 4) can be recognized by its short, dark green needles, which have two prominent white lines on the undersurface. The needles are from ⅓ to ⅔ inches long, tapering toward the tip. They are rather flat and are attached singly, as are the spruces and fir.

The needles of balsam fir (Fig. 5) are from ¾ to 1½ inches long, usually blunt or notched at the tip, and shiny, dark green. The under-surface is frequently silvery in color. Crushed balsam fir needles give a pleasant aromatic odor, hence the name "balsam fir." The cones



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

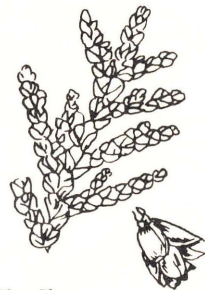


Fig. 7

of balsam fir are not used for decorations since they usually disintegrate while on the tree.

White spruce (Fig. 6), or black spruce, has short 4-angled needles which can be rolled between the fingers. The needles of the Norway spruce are longer, $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch, and rather flat. Norway spruce in addition bears the favorite cones for decorative purposes. An exotic species, Norway spruce does not occur naturally in Michigan forests. It has, however, been planted widely throughout the state.

Northern white cedar (Fig. 7) is readily distinguished by its foliage. Instead of needles, it has small leaves, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long, flattened scale-like, and light green in color. Growing naturally in flat sprays, it provides excellent decorative material.

FRUITS, NUTS AND BERRIES

In many decorations you'll need color to add to the background of green. Fruits, berries and nuts growing in your garden or yard, as well as in the forests, provide one of your best sources. They may be used in their natural color or, if you wish, can be gilded or enameled.

The cones from most evergreen trees are highly prized materials for decorating. They add to almost any kind of decoration, and are easy to attach.

Cones of the pines and spruces are particularly attractive. Found in various sizes and shapes, they may be selected to fit a particular decoration. Most cones are, however, somewhat resinous. The resin may be easily removed from the cones, or from your hands, by a cloth moistened in alcohol. You can collect cones at any time of the year.

You'll find that acorns, hazelnuts, milkweed pods, and sycamore balls, too, may be used to advantage. Frequently milkweed pods are silvered or gilded to give additional color. Acorns and hazelnuts can be attached to your ornament by piercing them with a heavy needle or small finishing nail, then by running string or wire through the hole.

Some of the garden fruits that can be used readily include the various rose seeds, gourds, barberry, and bittersweet. Small gourds, for example, can be enameled in different colors.

Miniature apples of the hawthorne or thornapple, found in pastures or abandoned fields, and the cranberries found in some of the bogs

in northern Michigan, are excellent for decorative purposes. You should collect them in the fall and preserve them with a coat of shellac. In fact, clear shellac will dress up the natural color of almost any nut or berry, and help you to save the less common ones from Christmas to Christmas.

In the making of a "Della Robbia" type of wreath, fresh fruits such as oranges, small apples, lemons, limes and kumquats are often used also.

EQUIPMENT

For most decorating work, you'll need only a minimum of equipment. A suggested equipment list, in addition to the greenery and fruits, would include the following:

sharp knife

old pair of heavy scissors

florist's thread or wire

**a quantity of No. 9 or No. 10 wire,
or old coat hangers, for frames**

ribbon.

Other materials you'll find highly useful are Scotch tape, shellac, a variety of paints or enamels, a pair of pliers, glue or liquid wax, and artificial snow, Epsom salts or mica flakes.

Don't overlook the possibilities in everyday materials. For example, fluted jello molds used as candle holders, or a "lucky" door wreath—made by winding a horseshoe with greenery—can be effective decorations because each has the spice of originality.

And an ordinary extension cord may be all that's needed to dramatize your decorations. Side-lighting or back-lighting often bring out hidden beauty in the simplest of arrangements.

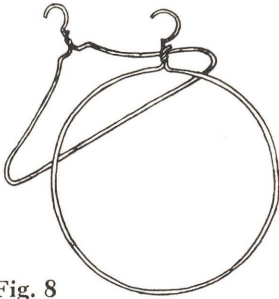


Fig. 8

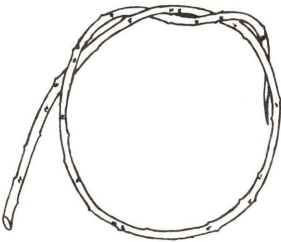


Fig. 9

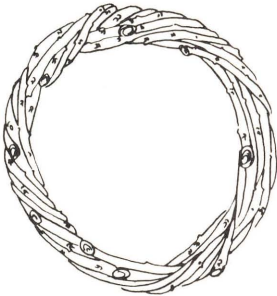


Fig. 10

WREATHS AND SIMILAR DECORATIONS

HOW TO MAKE WREATHS

Shears, thread, wire, evergreens and willow switches—or a wire frame—are your five basic ingredients for a wreath. With just a little practice, the technique becomes easy.

For the foundation, you may use either a hoop made from willow switches or a wire coat-hanger shaped into a circle—as shown in Figs. 8, 9 and 10. The coat hanger will be satisfactory for light weight wreaths. For the heavier ones which will decorate your door, however, or for wreaths which are to be packed or shipped, you may find a willow hoop preferable. The sprays have less tendency to slip on the wider base of a willow hoop.

For the hoops, select willow switches—or any other pliable canes—about 4 feet long and as thick as the base of your little finger. Shape them into circle of the desired size. (10 to 12 inches in diameter is a good, easy-to-handle size.) Wrap the small end of the cane in, over, and out of the circle until it holds firm.

If two canes are to be used to form a heavier base, weave the large part of the second willow switch into the thinnest part of the circle; then continue weaving it in as you did the first one. Cut off projecting ends, or weave them into the body of the foundation. With pliable pieces of willow, this foundation will usually not have to be tied or wired at all.

Once your frame is complete, it is wise to prepare the greenery so you'll have enough to finish the entire wreath. It is easier to wire several sprays of evergreens together first instead of trying to wrap each spray to the frame separately. However, you should wire your ornaments to the completed wreath rather than complicating the wreath-making by adding them as you go.

In adding the sprays, first tie end of florist's string securely to the frame. Then, holding the frame in left hand, place first of wired sprays on the frame and wrap at least 1 inch of the base of the spray with five or six turns of the string or wire. At least an inch of the 4 to 6-inch

spray must be fastened tightly to the frame, so that it will not fall out as the wreath dries.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

Add succeeding sprays in the same way, lapping the bushy part over the place at which the preceding spray was fastened, so that none of the wiring is visible. Continue until the entire circle is covered. Then fasten the wire or string tightly. The string or wire used should be kept in one long piece during the entire job of winding the wreath. (Figs. 11 and 12.)

Better results will be obtained—especially at first—if you apply your bunches of evergreen in a counter-clockwise direction and, also, if you wrap the wire from the inside toward the outside of the wreath. Once you've mastered the mechanics of the process, you may want to vary the appearance by having the sprays pointed in opposite directions—half of the wreath applied clockwise and half counterclockwise.

Or you may want to spray the lower half of the wreath with a white or silver paint, leaving the upper half in natural green. Another very beautiful variation, as the process becomes easier for you, is to make the wreath much thicker at the bottom. (Figs. 13 and 14.)

DECORATING WREATHS

Striking formal wreaths may now be made by wiring in glass ornaments, fitting them into the greenery in any desired pattern. Cones and colored ribbons, too, serve the same purpose.



Fig. 15

GOURDS—Gourds can be wired around the entire circle. Use them in their natural colors, or enamel them first.

DELLA ROBBIA—You can add shel-lacked fruit and nuts for something a little different in the way of color. Suitable fruits for this type of wreath, generally called a “Della Robbia” wreath, are listed in the section on materials.

CONE “FLOWERS”—Cones and red ribbon make an attractive, natural looking decoration. Have you ever seen “flowers” made by cutting larger cones in crosswise slices? They are quite different from the usual cone treatment, and very easy to make. Just cut crosswise through the cones, leaving two or three layers of scales to each rosette for easy wiring.

A word, too, about the ribbon you choose—remember that Christmas-time weather is likely to be damp instead of snowy. It’s wise to invest in special waterproof ribbon or use a substitute, such as oilcloth, for the bow on your outdoor wreaths. An oil cloth bow looks less stiff if cut with pinking shears. The freshest and perkier wreath loses its appeal when the bow is drooping and dejected; for this reason the oilcloth bow may be a wise choice if wreaths are to be shipped.

If you or your club prefer to try something in the way of novelty wreaths, here are a few suggestions for something just a little different in finishing touches for your basic wreaths.

NOVELTY IDEAS—Try crossed candy canes; either real ones or the plastic foam kind which are available in dime stores. The plastic foam types can be striped with red Scotch tape, instead of satin ribbon, so they’ll be weatherproof.

BELLS AND POMPONS—Bells can be wired to the wreath to provide a welcome as musical as it is colorful. Pipecleaner pompons are effective with the bells. You make them by fastening pipe cleaners tightly together at the center, then arranging them so that the individual cleaners spray out in all directions. The same technique is used to make pompons from cellophane straws, as mentioned in the

section on mantel decorations. The pipe cleaners have the added advantage here of being able to take a little rain or fog.

Small Christmas boxes, wrapped and decorated in bright oilcloth, are unusual when three or four are wired to a wreath.

TOYS—A child's toy drum or trumpet makes another attractive design. Fortunately, these toys are available in metal or plastic so they, too, won't mind a little bad weather.

Finally, if you have a helper who is handy with saw and drill, you might try making a replica of a set of child's blocks, each about 1½ inches square. Drill a hole through each for the wire, paint them in bright colors, and spell out your Christmas greetings on your wreath (Fig. 15).

SPRAYS

In addition to the regular wreaths, there are many other ways of decorating your front door so that it will say "Merry Christmas" for you.

Such decorations are quite colorful, and should be large enough to be enjoyed by passersby as well as visitors.

Sprays are very useful, and even easier to make than wreaths, since they use a large, flat piece of greenery as a base.

One of the simplest sprays depends on contrasting use of evergreens for its attractiveness. The base is a large branch of white cedar. A slightly smaller grouping of spruce, or fir, is then added. Sprays of white or Scotch pine are then wired to the fir, and the whole topped with cones and a ribbon. Of course, any decoration—formal or humorous—may be added.

Sprays can also be wired to a coat hanger, as shown in Fig. 16, and any of the trimming mentioned in the section on

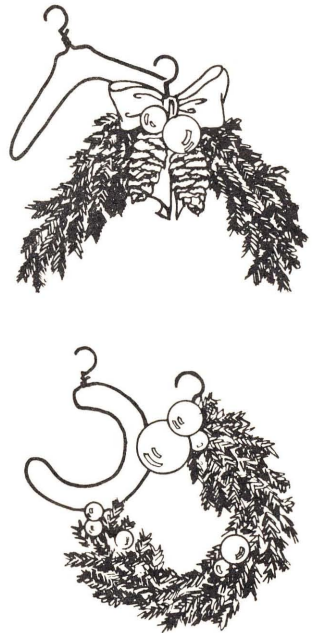


Fig. 16

wreaths adapted for use here. Oilcloth-wrapped gift boxes, bells, children's toys all are equally effective used on a spray. The coat hanger itself can be bent into any attractive modernistic shape.

In addition to these ideas, you may want to suspend small bells from ribbons of varying lengths (Fig. 17). Or you might "gift wrap" your whole door (Fig. 18). Use wide crossed strips of oilcloth, centered with a large red bow, a plain spray, and "gift tag" bearing your greetings. Fastening a painted and decorated wooden cheese box — filled with evergreen sprays and ornaments — to the ribbon will give an unusual trimming.

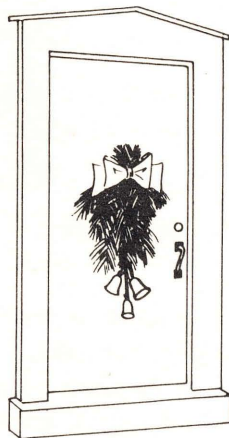


Fig. 17

EVERGREEN ROPES, GARLANDS AND FESTOONS

Evergreen ropes, garlands, or festoons are made in much the same manner as wreaths. Fairly heavy wire, an old rope, or an old electric light cord is recommended for the base or frame unless you are making a short decoration. One end of the cord or wire should be fastened to a stationary object, such as a door knob or chair, to make your work easier.

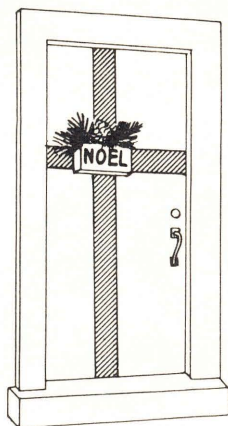


Fig. 18

Short evergreen sprigs, about 3 to 4 inches long, are then fastened on with florist's wire in the same fashion as in making the wreath. To add color to the decoration, attach cones, fruits and berries — or even fresh fruits — at regular intervals. Your favorite Christmas cards may also be used.

Festoons, garlands, and ropes make very good pieces for exterior door and window decorations, for staircases, or for the front of fireplaces (Fig. 19).

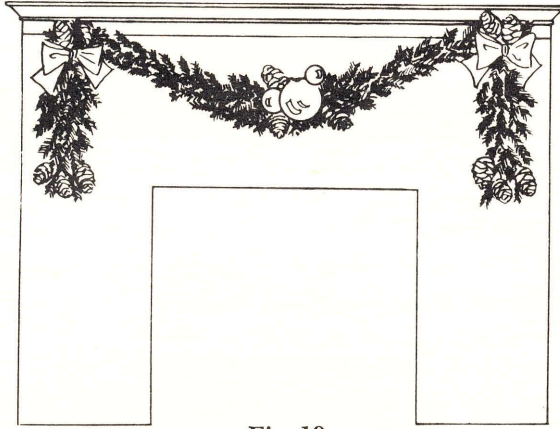


Fig. 19

If you are fortunate enough to have an old set of sleigh bells, you have an excellent base for an interior rope or garland (Fig. 20). Attach your sprays of evergreen at the top and bottom of the bells, but do not cover them. Sleigh bells are now a collector's item, so it is not recommended that they be hung on the outside of the house.

CORSAGES

For that special Christmas party, why not give your guests a Christmas corsage? Various kinds of corsages can be fashioned from a little greenery, fruits and berries, cones, pipe cleaners and ribbons.

One simple yet attractive corsage (Fig. 21) can be made by starting with a small spray of white cedar (about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide by 5 to $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches long). Next, lay on a sprig of fir about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide and 4 to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. Then, wire a single red pine cone or a pair of white spruce cones to it. To complete, add 3 twisted pipe cleaners, as shown, plus a red bow; then wire together.

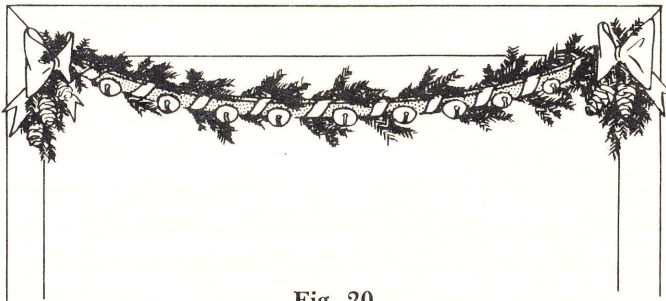


Fig. 20

THE CHRISTMAS TABLE

Especially if yours is a family which makes every effort to be together each Christmas dinner, you'll want something unusual in the way of decorations for your table. To most men, of course, that golden brown turkey or fragrant ham is the real centerpiece, but even Dad will enjoy a touch of color. You can supply it in many ways—the tablecloth itself can be decorated, individual place-settings may be featured, and there is the centerpiece itself.

To many, the white linen cloth is traditional, but it can be trimmed in several ways. For example, use a runner of red cellophane down the center of the table. It can be scalloped or cut with pinking shears to give a more attractive edge. Or silver paper can be cut into star or snowflake shapes and scattered over the surface of the cloth, or grouped around the centerpiece. It is possible, too, to cut larger stars or snowflakes and use them under each individual plate. Being perfectly flat, these decorations create no problem when food is served.



Fig. 21

Another striking idea is to sew a border of stars, or a tinsel rope, or tiny bells to the hem or corners of the tablecloth (Fig. 22). This requires a little more work but can be very effective.

Individual place settings, too, can brighten your Christmas table. In one very simple design you use a white cloth with a very large red star of paper in the center. (A standard size bright red desk blotter, found in any dime store, will be about the right size for such a large design without having to piece the paper). Centered on the star are white candles banked with small sprays of evergreen.

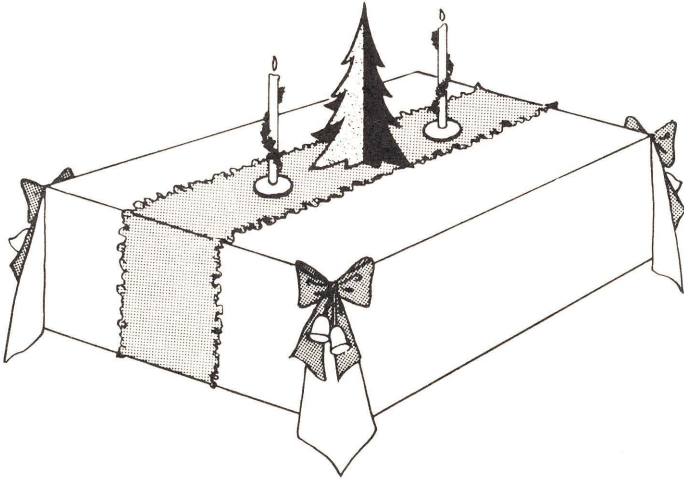


Fig. 22

The real feature of the table, however, is the napkins. Attractively folded and centered on each plate, they can be decorated in one corner with a tiny sprig of evergreen, a single bell, and a bright ribbon. The decorations are sewed to the napkin.

PLACE CARDS—Your place cards may range from tiny individual trees to the simplest of decorated cards. The trees are made by placing appropriately shaped clusters of evergreen in moist plaster-of-Paris. When this compound has hardened, the miniature tree stands upright and can be decorated with small metallic gummed stars or multi-colored gumdrops.

An idea which the children particularly enjoy is a collection of marshmallow snowmen (Fig. 23), or gumdrop animals (Fig. 24), to hold each place card. Whole cloves are used for eyes and buttons. Long gumdrops, with toothpicks inserted, are used for the arms. The hat, and perhaps a small broom, could be cut from construction paper. Gumdrop animals will require only the candies, toothpicks, cloves—and a child's imagination.

Or if time is short, the simplest of place cards (Fig. 25) can be made from a fold of stiff

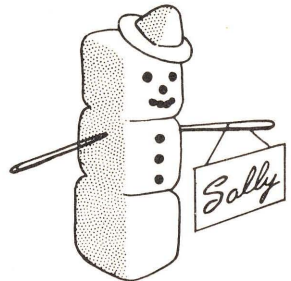


Fig. 23

white paper with a tiny sprig of evergreen and a small cone, or bow, glued at one side.

THE CENTERPIECE

Your centerpiece, usually the outstanding feature of any Christmas table, should conform to certain rules. It should be in proper proportion to the size and shape of the table, and if it is to be left in place during the meal should be kept quite low so it will not act as a screen, masking one half of your table from the other.

Because many attractive centerpieces feature tall candles—and are themselves necessarily tall in order to be effective—you may want to make yours movable by mounting it on a pretty tray or a candleboard made especially for the occasion. (See detailed description of candleboard in section on Mantel Decorations). This is another possibility for your club to consider if you are planning to make Christmas decorations for public sale.

POPCORN BALLS—Since Christmas is essentially for the children, here are two centerpiece ideas which will appeal especially to them. The first is to make eight or ten popcorn balls, and insert a gay candy cane in the center of each. You can then heap them on a base of greenery in the center of the table. They may be used alone, or piled around a fat red candle (Fig. 26) or a Santa Claus figure.

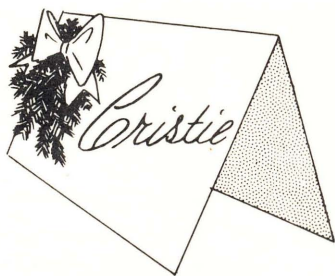


Fig. 25

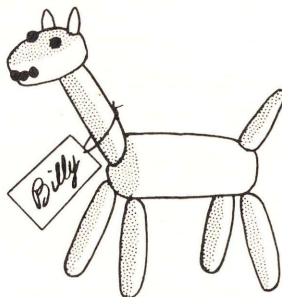


Fig. 24

GIFTS—The second plan is to feature a Christmas stocking, or perhaps a replica of Santa's cap filled with small gifts. The gifts are most attractive wrapped in brilliant metallic paper. A narrow ribbon can be run from each to one of the place cards on the table. Then, at a given signal each person draws his own gift from the stocking or cap.

Of course, it isn't necessary to wrap real gifts, empty boxes will look just as attractive. But here's your opportunity to include those little dime-store joke gifts which add so much fun to the general family festivities.

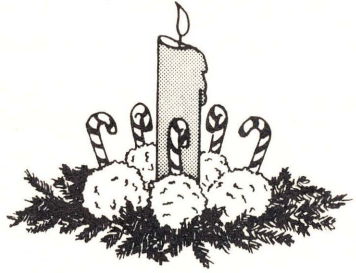


Fig. 26

LAZY SUSANS—If you're lucky enough to have one of the revolving two or three-tiered trays, usually called "Lazy Susans," you have a perfect base for your centerpiece. Fill each tier with greens, then add glass balls, pine cones, tiny candy canes, or any other appropriate material (Fig. 27). You might also place two white candles wreathed in evergreen at either side. These are easily fashioned by fastening very small sprays of greenery to a single thickness of florist's wire, then spiralling the wire around the candle.

MINIATURE TREES—You can make miniature Christmas trees for use as table decorations in any number of forms. Here are descriptions of two types for either a home or club project.

The first tree is made by cutting two identical tree-shapes from medium weight cardboard. Cover the cardboard on each side with green construction paper, or paint it with green enamel. In cutting the tree shape, you'll find it best to make the tips of the branches curve up slightly so as to hold whatever decoration you may choose.

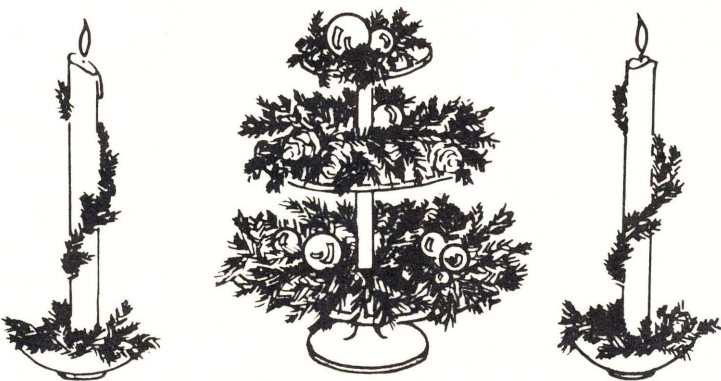


Fig. 27

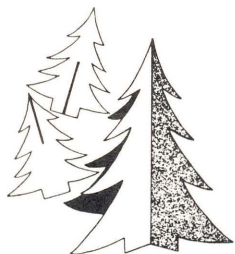


Fig. 28

After the tree shapes are ready, notch them as shown in the drawing (Fig. 28) and fit them into each other at right angles. Then the tree can be decorated with strings of gumdrops, popcorn or cranberries, and a paper star at the top. If you make the tree from plywood it can be used year after year.

The second type of tree (Fig. 29) is made from a cone of chicken wire filled with slightly moistened sphagnum or wood moss. Single sprays of evergreen, 4 to 6 inches long, are then inserted firmly into the moss base to outline a very bushy miniature tree. These trees are not difficult to make, and should make an excellent item for club sale—especially if placed on a small tray.

They can be decorated in the traditional way, but a novel idea is to use cellophane-wrapped multi-colored lollipops: Insert them into the moss base as you do the evergreen sprays. But better include some cranberries wired together and inserted too; the lollipops have a strange way of vanishing with children around!

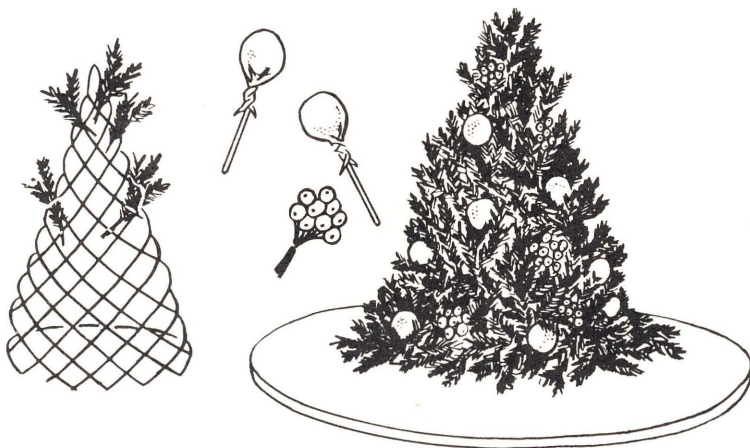


Fig. 29

MANTEL DECORATIONS

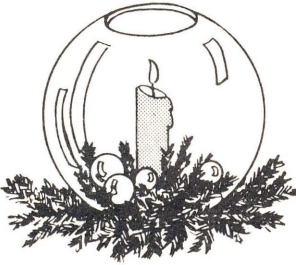


Fig. 30

Your mantel decorations can serve a dual purpose. In many cases they can be quickly adapted to your table, if desired, simply by mounting them on an easily moved tray. With the exception of the ropes and swags and the mirrored wreath, you may want to consider the ideas mentioned in this section for the Christmas table, too.

Since the mantel decoration is usually second in importance only to the tree, it can feature those very large red candles which you find too large to be used elsewhere, or a number of tall white candles. You'll probably also want to bank the entire mantel with greens to complement both candles and the main decoration. Here again, the ideas mentioned are most adaptable for large scale production if you're looking for a club project.

ROSE BOWL—If you have a rose bowl, such as can be purchased at any dime store, you have the basis for a particularly unusual and safe decoration (Fig. 30)—a “candle bowl.” Mount a colored candle in the center of the bowl with modeling clay or melted wax. Around it place a few sprigs of evergreen and some bright glass balls. As simply as that, you have your candle bowl. Be certain the flame does not come above the rim of the bowl, and, of course, check it once the candle has burned for a while. An unused aquarium, or any attractively shaped glass jar, can be substituted for the rose bowl.

MIRROR AND MADONNA—If you want a more formal and very beautiful mantel decoration (Fig. 31), mount a fairly large mirror in a base of modeling clay. Surround the base with evergreens. Arrange the sprays around the mirror in a crescent shape (the modeling clay base used to anchor the mirror will also support the branches). For the finishing touch, stand a Madonna figure or a large candle just in front of the mirror. If you prefer something less formal, use a large Santa Claus candle.



Fig. 31

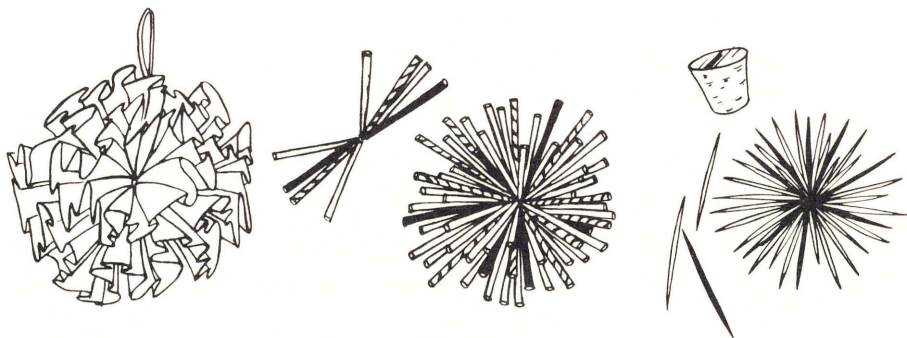


Fig. 32

Sprays of pine and fir arranged along a mantel top can also be trimmed simply and attractively by scattering stars or pompons among the branches. Briefly, here are the directions for making two different types of stars (Fig. 32) which can be used on tables, mantels, wreaths—or almost anywhere to provide Christmas color.

POMPONS—For cellophane pompons, take a strip of colored cellophane about 5 inches wide and any desired length (the longer the strip the “fatter” the pompon will be). Gather this strip at the center and fasten with a twist of thin wire—leaving about 3 inches on both ends of the wire for fastening to the branches.

A different colorful “star” is made by taking a bundle of brightly colored cellophane straws and fastening them at the center with wire. When you twist the wire tight the straws will spread out into a pompon of brilliant color.

Try filling the holes in an ordinary inverted colander with a combination of cellophane straws, and evergreen sprays. Place an electric light beneath the colander to reflect on the cellophane straws. The whole can be the basis for a mantel or table centerpiece.

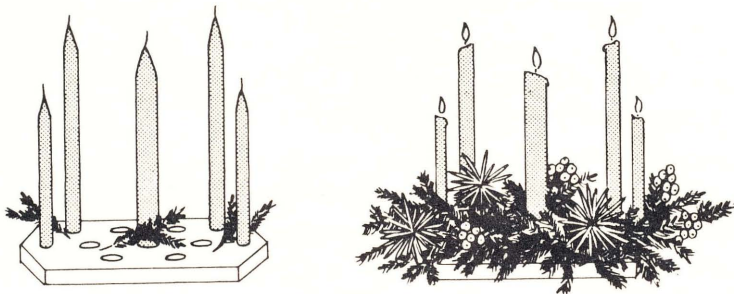


Fig. 33

CANDLEBOARDS—Candleboards (Fig. 33), useful all year round, are made from any piece of wood an inch thick and of almost any shape. Drill holes about $\frac{7}{8}$ inch in diameter—the size of the average candle—arranged in any pattern. When painted in seasonal colors and decorated with pompons and greens, candleboards also provide a very saleable item.

A great variety of arrangements is possible on such a board since a different grouping of candles can be used each time with the unused holes covered by the greenery.

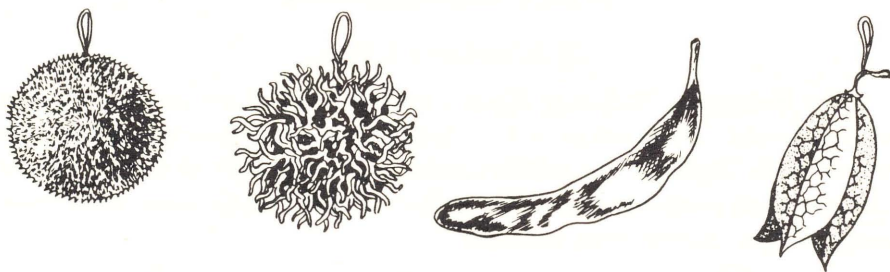


Fig. 34

TREE ORNAMENTS

A novel addition to the traditional colored-ball tree ornaments are painted or gilded seed pods and seed balls. Seed pods of the honey locust, trumpet vine and bladdernut—and the seed balls of such trees as sweet gum and sycamore—provide excellent materials. (Fig. 34.) Painted gold or silver, or with a bright-colored enamel, the pods and balls add sparkle to the Christmas tree.

The seed pods or balls should be allowed to dry. If given several coats of clear shellac before painting, they should last indefinitely without falling apart. The paint is most satisfactorily applied by dipping or spraying. Hangers can be made of florists wire or ribbon.

Cones can be used for this purpose, too. Suspend them at regular intervals from a long rope of tinsel or from a ribbon. If enameling them in bright colors appeals to you, you may want to substitute cones, seed balls and pods for all of the usual glass balls. The idea can be carried out very attractively and has the added features of being far

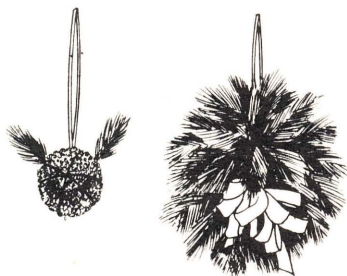


Fig. 35

safer in homes where small children may be cut by broken glass ornaments. Strings of popcorn and cranberries can provide the tree with additional color.

You can guarantee "snow" for the holiday by placing absorbent cotton along all the branches of the tree—or by whipping soapsuds very stiff and dry and piling it on the tree. It will last for

the entire holiday season if whipped very dry.

OTHER DECORATIONS

AN EVERGREEN BALL

The Evergreen Ball (Fig. 35) is another unusual use for short sprigs of evergreen. First, shape a 4 to 6-inch ball of moistened sphagnum moss firmly—but not too solidly—and tie it with wire or string. Then fasten a long piece of wire to the ball so that it can be suspended from a chandelier, doorway or window.

After the base is prepared, cut small sprays of greenery 5 to 6 inches long and sharpen their ends. Then insert the sprays into the moss until the entire surface is covered—much in the same way as "pomander balls" used to be made by inserting cloves into an orange until the entire surface was covered. Make the evergreen sprays form an even well-rounded ball. As a final decorative touch, a many-looped bow of red ribbon—or a number of cones or small bells—may be wired to a small sharpened stick and inserted.

THE KISSING RING

Everyone is young in spirit at Christmas time and you'll want to include a spray of mistletoe somewhere for the extra laughter and fun it can bring to the holiday. This Christmas, instead of just tacking the sprig in a doorway, why not make a "kissing ring"? (Fig. 36). You can do it by winding an embroidery hoop, or circle of cardboard, with white crepe paper and then striping it with colorful Scotch tape. Then add the spray of mistletoe and suspend the ring from a doorway or arch with a bright ribbon.



Fig. 36

For a different decoration, frame the sprig of mistletoe with two boughs of greenery tied by a large red bow.

Still another suggestion is the "kissing ball." This is merely a combination of the evergreen ball and the kissing ring. Make an evergreen ball as described above, attach a large red bow at the top, then suspend the sprig of mistletoe from the bottom.

GIFT WRAPPING

To give an extra touch to your gift wrapping add a branch of greenery, and perhaps some cones. Small sprays of white pine or fir are excellent for the purpose. If you prefer additional color, brush the sprays of greenery with glue, varnish or liquid wax; then dip in Epsom salts or artificial snow.

Another suggestion: Make your name cards from birch bark, if a small amount is available from a dead or down tree. Peeled thin, it can be cut into any shape desired and readily attached to your package

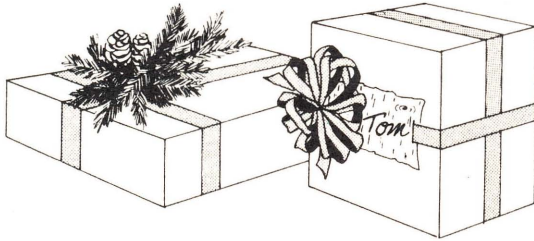


Fig. 37

by slipping the ribbon or string through small slits. (CAUTION: It is illegal to peel the bark from live birch trees not growing on your own land; even with your own trees the practice is unwise as it will eventually destroy the tree.)

If you favor large ribbon bows for your packages, you'll find it attractive to attach small cones—black and white spruce, hemlock or white cedar—to the free ends of the ribbon. Use the ever-useful florist's wire, or thread which matches the color of the ribbon. Figure 37 illustrates gift wrapping suggestions.

RAINBOW FLAMES FOR YOUR FIREPLACE

Would you like an extra treat for your Christmas celebration? Or an unusual gift for a special friend? With a small expenditure of time and money you can treat pine cones to burn in all the colors of the rainbow.

First, of course, obtain a supply of dry pine or spruce cones. (In lieu of cones, small blocks of well-dried wood will do.) Then decide

on the color of flames you want, and obtain the proper chemicals with which to treat the cones. These chemicals produce the flame colors listed opposite them, when burned:

barium nitrate	-	-	-	-	-	-	blue
copper sulfate	-	-	-	-	-	-	bluish
strontium nitrate	-	-	-	-	-	-	red
calcium chloride	-	-	-	-	-	-	orange
copper chloride	-	-	-	-	-	-	green
lithium chloride or							
potassium permanganate	-	-	-	-	-	-	purple

You can purchase them from—or through—your local drug store at prices ranging from 30 cents to over \$2.50 per pound. The less expensive chemicals—such as barium nitrate, calcium chloride and copper sulfate—give highly satisfactory results.

The simplest and best method for treating is to dip the cones into a solution of the chemical and water.

Before beginning, be certain your container is suitable. The container should be a wooden tub or pail, or an earthen crock. Since the chemicals will destroy metal, don't use a metal bucket unless you plan to throw it away afterward.

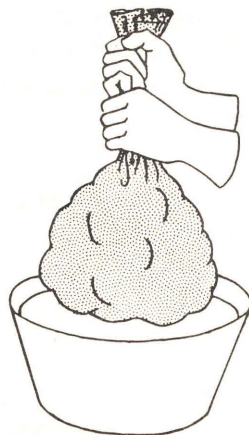


Fig. 38

Thoroughly dissolve the chemical in water; a ratio of 1 pound of chemical to 1 gallon of water. Place the cones in a cloth mesh bag, such as an old onion or potato sack, and immerse in the solution (Fig. 38). Since many of the chemicals will leave stains on your hands, rubber gloves are recommended. Potassium permanganate in particular leaves dark brown stains which remain for a long time.

Remove the cones, after soaking them in solution for 10 to 15 minutes. Allow them to drain over the container for a few minutes, then spread them on newspapers to dry overnight. When dry, they are ready for use in your fireplace.

Following the treatment of cones, the unused chemicals should be bottled up for future use, or disposed of. *Keep them away from children or pets.*

If you wish, the treated cones can be placed in attractive bags made from colored mosquito netting, or heavy net onion—or orange—sacks. For varying colors in burning, mix up cones treated with different chemicals in the same bag.

The pungent scent from the burning cones, and the colored flames in your fireplace lighting the room, will provide an ideal Christmas Eve setting, or a perfect close to the family's Christmas Day.