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## Season's "Greenings" "It's not easy being green!" Kermit the Frog

By Cynthia Brian



Grapevine wreath Photo Cynthia Brian

orchards and from our kitchen. The pruned cuttings from the Zinfandel vines were gathered, stripped of leaves, and woven into festive wreaths. Long before I founded Be the Star You Are!(r) charity, I was rescuing books from flea markets and garage sales providing them a new home on my bookshelf. We were green before green was cool.

My rural upbringing influences my design sensibilities, my interior and garden design training aids in the employment of the principles of form and function, while my imagination adds the final magical touch of simplicity and sophistication. You, too, can share the warmth, the creativity, and the joy of decorating with my whimsical version of holiday "greening."

Your first step is to take a treasure trek through your garden. Focus on the shapes, textures, colors, and scents that envelope your senses. What natural elements can you gather to add to your decor? Don your gloves, grab a basket, attach your shears to your jeans and begin the decorating challenge. Besides conifers, a few of my favorite holiday staples include branches and seed pods from magnolia and pistache trees, berries and branches from cotoneaster, pyracanthas, bay, and holly, twisted vines from grapes, and any old wood that has moss growing on it.

Here are a few of my favorite garden elements to add to your holiday cheer.

- To decorate naturally start at the mailbox by hanging a spray of magnolia leaves tied in a colorful ribbon. Magnolias with their coned seedpods stimulate an unexpected holiday welcome.
- Do you still have whole pumpkins or gourds from Thanksgiving? Give them a spray of silver, bronze, or gold paint and tuck them into an arrangement on your porch. Add three pots of white azaleas for a crisp, clean look.
- Make a wreath out of California bay leaves. Add sprigs of lavender, rosehips, and a few antique bells for a welcome that smells delightful.
- Once inside the house, dress every room with holiday cheer. Make fresh green garlands from swaths of redwood branches. Tie dried hydrangeas, roses, and purple sage onto the swags, wrap with gossamer organdy ribbon in a complimentary color for a fragrant and elegant entrance. Add petite white lights for a bit of glamour.
- Add the merry pink berries from the pistache tree to your Christmas tree and to garlands on staircases or mantels.
- Did you allow your artichokes to flower? Cut them to dry to a lovely golden color. The purple fuzz accents the interior. Place in a purple glass bottle graced with an origami ornament plus fresh greenery.
- Gather pinecones. The house smells wonderful with a few added to a wood burning fire. (Be alert for spare the air days!)
- Fill a bowl with walnuts with the hulls. Add a reindeer hat, a cracker, and a pot of paper whites.
- Collect fallen branches that may have lichen on moss on them. If you have any antique children's toys (I use a child's wheelbarrow), fill it with the wood. Attach a bow and pewter -all.
- Cut a few twigs from persimmon or pomegranate with the fruit attached to arrange on your kitchen counter. Lemons and limes are also attractive and smell great.
- Scour the ground for any birds' nests that have fallen. (Do not take any nests from bushes or trees as birds tend to return to their homes the following season.) Enhance the nest with candied eggs, augment with an angel and coordinated candle.
- Pair evergreens with satin ribbons and gold bells. Look around your house for objects that are rarely used that could find another life as a vessel for holly.
- Vines of all kind are easily manipulated into spectacular wreaths. Grape vines, pink bower, and wisteria are my preferences. To help the vines be more malleable, soak them in a bathtub of water for 24 hours before creating your masterpieces.
- Ditch your tired houseplants and replace them with seasonal favorites such as poinsettias, cyclamens, and orchids. They come in a

December ushers in the shortest and darkest days of the year as we prepare for the chilliness of winter. Thank goodness we have the holidays to bring us good cheer and merriment. Are you suffering from the winter blues? Then consider decorating green!

The glitter, the sparkle, the dazzle of holiday decor! I love the smells of cinnamon, cider, chestnuts roasting, and evergreens. The caroling, bells ringing, smiling children, and good cheer heralds the season of joy. The holiday experience that I have never enjoyed is the commercialism and the shopping mania overload. Like always when I'm stressed, I head to the garden for my inspiration.

Few leaves remain on the cottonwood tree at the moment, but the ones that cling to branches resemble flitting silver butterflies flapping their wings in the wind. "Yes," I whisper to myself, "I'll deck the halls for the holidays with innovations from Mother Nature."

December is always a season of giving. When I was growing up on the farm, most of our decorations and all our presents were hand made. We used whatever we could find to create something special for each family member. With remnants of yarn and old wire hangers, we'd crochet a frame that any garment would hang on. With bits of paper glued onto old jars, new vases for flowers bloomed. Jams, jellies, and candied walnuts were gifts from our

variety of exquisite colors perfect for any decor. Don't dot the room with individual pots. Group three or four plants in a basket or large container for immediate impact.

- Drape inexpensive gauze or other lightweight fabric on window rods. Hang ribbons with attached dried flowers to give a new look to your solid color draperies.

- Use lots of natural beeswax candles between fresh ivy plant balls or rosemary spheres on a large platter dotted with silver or gold ornaments.

- Edible ornaments are always fun. String cranberries, popcorn, and small apples with individual nametags and eat while fresh.

- Items made from bamboo, cork, wood, glass, or natural fibers are healthier for your family and for the planet. Make cork wreaths and trees from those empty bottles of wine and champagne you've been saving.

- Wrap packages in newspaper with twine instead of buying wrapping paper. Repurpose greeting cards as gift tags.

- My favorite indulgence is lights, probably because as a child living in the boondocks, my parents lit up the farm so Rudolph would see the runway. That hasn't changed. Just as the star of Bethlehem led the way to the manager, the twinkling lights of our hearth lead our hearts to our home.

Whatever tradition you celebrate this time of year, be it Channukah, Christmas, or Kwanza, make it a green season. Going all out to create a holiday look is immensely rewarding but only if you don't turn decorating into a burden instead of a blessing. Give the gift of yourself and eliminate the stress. Nothing in nature is perfect. Why should we be? Exchange gifts which are hand made, reused, grown in your garden, crafted in your kitchen. Be sustainable.

Kermit had it all wrong. It's easy and it's fun to be green once you decide that living in this world means we have a responsibility to be good stewards. Despite the downward spiral in our economy, we are all wealthy because we have one another. Be grateful for what you have instead of moaning for what you desire. Savor the glitter, the sparkle, the dazzle of holiday decor, the cinnamon, the ringing bells, the children singing, the smell of evergreens and chestnuts roasting. Celebrate and rejoice your gift of life.

"Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful." Norman Vincent Peale

May you all enjoy a very happy, healthy, positive, sustainable Holiday filled with joy, love, memories, mirth, magic, and hope.

Until next year!

Season's Greenings! SHINE ON!



Cottonwood branches in child's wheelbarrow Photo Cynthia Brian



Walnuts by fountain with narcissus Photo Cynthia Brian



Happy Gardening to You!

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