

Christmas decorations from your backyard

Christmas decorations gathered from your backyard will be fresher and more aromatic as compared to most that you might buy. And, you may have unusual greenery that would be difficult to find for purchase.

Theresa Friday, UF/IFAS Extension Agent in Santa Rosa County, provides ideas on what to consider when collecting your own outdoor decorations for indoor use in today's article.

The best greenery for indoor decorations comes from cedar, ivy, pine and holly. Pines, firs and cedars are especially good to use for indoor decoration since they dry out slowly and hold their needles best at warm interior temperatures. They may last for several weeks if properly treated and cared for.

Other greenery to consider includes arborvitae, ligustrum, pittosporum, podocarpus, viburnum, Leyland cypress, nandina and Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*).

When gathering live greenery, you are actually pruning the plants. So consider carefully which branches to cut and which ones to leave. Distribute the cuts evenly around the plant to preserve its natural form.

Use clean, sharp pruners to cut branches and immediately put the cut ends into water until ready to use. Crushing the ends of woody stems allows them to take in more water. And soaking the cuttings in water overnight allows them to absorb the maximum amount of water. Commercial sprays are available that can be used to provide some fire resistance.

Never place fresh greenery near heat sources, such as space heaters, heater vents or sunny windows. Keep greenery away from candles and fireplaces. If you use lights near your green arrangements, make sure they stay cool, and if outside, that they are rated for exterior use.

Check your decorations every couple of days for freshness. If the greenery becomes dry, either replace or remove the dry portions. Discard dry greenery to prevent a fire hazard.

Also look for bright berries, decorative cones or pods. Attractive seedpods make great additions to dried arrangements. Look for magnolia and pine cones, sweet gum balls, acorns, pecans (these can be glued into clusters with other nuts) and many others you can find in your yard.

The leafless branches of deciduous trees are excellent to use in dried arrangements. Try using branches of oak, sweet gum, crape myrtle and winged elm.

Be aware, however, that some popular plants used in holiday decorating can present poisoning hazards for small children or pets. Poisonous berries are found on holly plants, yews, mistletoe, ivy plants, Jerusalem cherry and crown of thorns. The pearly white berries of mistletoe are particularly toxic. Keep all these plants out of reach of children and curious pets.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, December 10, 2008