

Flora & Fauna

Bringing the Beauty of Winter Indoors

Home decorating can be a lot of fun. Sprucing up your home décor inside and out gives your house interest and shows how much you care about it. However, seasonal crafts and decorative home accents can stress household and holiday budgets. Don't worry; there are many ways to decorate naturally with little or no cost – save a little sweat equity.

Plastic products pollute the earth both in their production and disposal. So instead, consider natural elements. A hike through your own backyard or a nearby wooded area (with the owner's permission) will yield all the elements you need for winter decorating.

Evergreen trees and shrubs provide an abundant source for decorating. Branches and twigs cut from evergreen spruces, pines, and cedars are easy to use and look great throughout winter. Evergreen boughs are great for making seasonal wreaths, but the sturdy, long-lasting boughs can be used in many other ways, too. Make a striking container arrangement by standing boughs in interesting metal buckets or baskets. Small twigs of spruce or other evergreen placed in vases around the house look great and bring a wonderful aroma.

Tree nuts, acorns, and cones from pines and evergreens are abundant in the woods. Pick them by the bagful and create some potpourri and basket displays. Use them in centerpieces and as accents on wreaths and swags. Simple baskets filled with pinecones make fragrant, rustic decorative accents. Mix in acorns and nuts for more interest.

Shrubs and vines offer many kinds of berries that make beautiful additions to winter decorating, in all the right colors of the season. Winterberry shrubs, a member of the Holly family, lose their leaves in the fall to reveal bright red berries. Staff Vines have berries that are red, with a ladybug-like split coat of orange over the top. The dual colors of the Staff Vine berry add interest to grapevine wreaths, containers, swags, evergreens and more.

Birch trees, most noted as white, papery-looking trees, are a great source of natural decoration. The peeled bark can be used to make lampshades, baskets and to matte pictures. Trace cookie cutters onto birch bark, cut out and string for natural, rustic decorations. Hang them throughout your home or on your Christmas tree. **Please note:** When harvesting bark for decorations, it is best to gather birch bark from fallen or dead trees. Removing bark from live, standing trees will kill them.

The natural world outdoors is the perfect place to "shop" for your winter décor. Covering your home with these fabulous free decorations is a great, environmentally friendly way to decorate. You'll not only be saving your budget, but you'll also be saving the environment by reducing the plastic products you buy, and will eventually throw away!

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Cleaning Corner: *Cleaning Silver*

It's time to pull out your best silver for the holidays, and - surprise, surprise - it's tarnished! Here are a few tips on how to remove tarnish and keep your silver looking its best.

1. Place tarnished silver in a glass dish, add a piece of aluminum foil, and cover with 1 quart of hot water mixed with 1 tablespoon baking soda. A reaction between the foil and the silver will remove any tarnish. *Note: Don't use this process on raised designs; you will lose the dark accents of the pattern.*
2. Make a paste of 3 parts baking soda to 1 part water. Using a soft cloth, rub the paste gently on the silver. Tarnish will disappear rapidly. After rinsing, buff the silver with a soft cloth.
3. Make a paste by mixing powdered white chalk with just enough ammonia to moisten. Rub the paste gently on the silver with a soft cloth. Rinse and buff to bring up the shine.

December

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| 1423 | King James I is released from captivity when his government agrees to pay off his 40,000 pound ransom in six annual installments |
| 1586 | Sir Thomas Herriot introduced potatoes to England after tasting them in South America |
| 1804 | At Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, Napoleon Bonaparte crowns himself Emperor of the French, the first French Emperor in a thousand years |
| 1824 | Following the election, four men were tied for the American presidency. The House of Representatives declared John Quincy Adams the winner |
| 1833 | The nation's first co-ed college opens its doors: Ohio's Oberlin College |
| 1979 | Christie's auctions off a rare, painted, porcelain thimble for the record-breaking price of \$18,000 |

Health Tips: Common Winter Health Ailments

The winter season is filled with sparkling snowflakes, skaters gracefully gliding across the ice, and, unfortunately a host of winter-related illnesses. Keep yourself and your family healthy this season with a few health and safety precautions.

The common cold can be caused by one of over 100 different virus strains. In the US, most people average about three colds every year. The cold virus usually lasts 1-2 weeks and can cause any number of symptoms: sore throat, sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes, aches and pains, mild fever, nasal congestion and coughing. The best way to treat a cold is to take a mild pain reliever, avoid unnecessary activity, get as much bed rest as possible, and drink plenty of fluids. Over-the-counter cough and cold remedies may relieve the symptoms, but they will not prevent or cure the illness.

Influenza (the flu) is not a serious health threat for most people. However, for the elderly or those who have a chronic health problem, influenza can result in serious complications. Symptoms of the flu usually develop about three days after being exposed to the virus. They include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, soreness and aching in the back, arms and legs. Although these are similar to those caused by cold viruses, flu symptoms tend to be more severe and last longer. The flu is highly contagious and, if it occurs in your family or community, there is no practical way to avoid exposure to the virus. Bed rest, a mild pain reliever (one that doesn't contain aspirin) and lots of fluids are the best treatment.

Hypothermia, a drop in body temperature to 95°F or less, can be fatal if not detected and treated right away. While hypothermia can happen to anyone, the elderly run the highest risk because their bodies often do not adjust to changes in temperature quickly and they may be unaware that they are gradually getting colder. The condition can develop over a period of time, anywhere from a few days to several weeks, and even mildly cool indoor temperatures of 60 to 65°F can trigger it. If you have elderly relatives or friends who live alone, encourage them to set their thermostats above 65°F to avoid hypothermia. Signs of hypothermia include: forgetfulness, drowsiness, slurred speech, change in appearance (e.g., puffy face), weak pulse, slow heartbeat, and very slow and shallow breathing. If you notice these symptoms, call an ambulance or take the victim directly to a hospital. Do not give alcoholic beverages. Do not give a hot shower or bath, since it could cause shock. Generally, do not try to treat hypothermia at home.

Frostbite usually affects exposed areas of the face (cheeks, nose, chin, forehead), the ears, wrists, hands and feet. Frostbitten skin is whitish and stiff and feels numb rather than painful. To treat frostbite, warm the affected part of the body gradually. Wrap the area in blankets, sweaters, coats, etc. If no warm wrappings are available, place frostbitten hands under the armpits or use your body to cover the affected area. Do not rub frostbitten areas; the friction can damage the tissue. Do not apply snow to frostbitten areas. If the area continues to feel cold or numb for an extended period of time despite treatment, seek medical attention.

Kid Corner: Winter Safety Tips

Winter is an exciting time for kids. It brings great outdoor activities, such as snowboarding and skating, but also cold weather, ice and snow, which can present a danger. But that doesn't mean they can't enjoy these winter activities. Here are some winter safety tips for parents and children.

In General

- Never allow children to play outside alone. Establish a buddy system with one or more of their friends and have them look out for one another. Children younger than eight years of age should always be supervised outside.
- Tell children not to put their tongues on cold metal. It may sound silly, but some kids still do it.
- Apply sunscreen to exposed skin, even when it's cloudy. You can still get a sunburn in winter.

Clothing

- Dress children in several layers of clothing. If they get too warm, they can remove a layer.
- Make sure children wear a hat, earmuffs, and mittens instead of gloves.
- Dress children in warm, waterproof boots that are roomy enough to wiggle their toes around.

Ice Skating

- Make sure children always wear a hockey or ski helmet while ice skating.
- Make sure children's skates are comfortable and have good ankle support to prevent twists, sprains or breaks.
- When possible, have children skate on public indoor or outdoor rinks. If this is not possible, children should remember to obey all signs posted on or near the ice. Yellow signs usually mean skate with caution, and red usually means no skating allowed.

Sledding

- Never use a sled with sharp or jagged edges.
- Make sure the handholds on the sled are secure.
- Never sled on or near roadways.
- Look for shallow slopes that are free of trees, fences or any other obstacles.
- Avoid sledding on crowded slopes.

Playing in the Snow

- Children should NOT build snow forts or make tunnels. They can collapse and suffocate a child.
- Children should NOT play in or on snow banks. The driver of a snowplow or other vehicle may not see a child.
- Children should NOT throw snowballs that are hard-packed or contain a rock or some other hard object.

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 4 large red, orange and yellow bell peppers, seeded and diced
- 1 medium potato, chopped
- 1/2-1 tsp salt
- 1/2-1 tsp red pepper flakes (according to your spice preference)
- 1½-2 cups vegetable stock

1. Heat the olive oil in the large saucepan. Add the onion and sauté for 3-4 minutes.
2. Add remaining ingredients except the stock and bring to a simmer.
3. Cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer. Stir occasionally for one hour, until the peppers are tender.
4. Pour half of the pepper mixture into the blender and purée, followed by the other half. Meanwhile, put the stock in the small saucepan and bring to a simmer.
5. Optional: if you want a smoother soup, you can pour it through a sieve at this point.
6. Return the soup to the saucepan, stir in the stock (use more for a thinner soup), taste and season.
7. Serve hot or cold, with any of these toppings: crème fraîche, sour cream, plain yogurt, chives, dill or scallions.

The Beauty of Peppers

Want to color your life healthy? Brightly colored bell peppers, whether green, red, orange or yellow, are rich sources of some of the best nutrients available. Peppers are excellent sources of vitamin C, vitamin A, vitamin B6, folic acid, lycopene, fiber and beta-carotene. They can help reduce the risk of developing certain diseases such as: cancers of the prostate, cervix, bladder, colon and pancreas, cataracts, atherosclerosis, heart disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and asthma to name a few!

Keep holiday decoration fire safety in mind

With more than 32 million homes decoration real Christmas trees this season, according to the National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA), there is no doubt that this holiday season will bring cheer. While it's easy to get caught up in the holiday shuffle of dinners, gifts and travel, safety should be at the top of everyone's lists.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and Underwriters Laboratories (UL), an independent safety testing organization, are partnering this season to remind consumers about the importance of safe holiday decorating habits.

Keeping fresh Christmas trees well-watered is not only vital to the tree's decorative longevity, but also to keeping consumers safe this holiday season. If ignited, a dry tree can become engulfed in flames in a matter of seconds, as opposed to a well-watered tree, according to NCTA. With so many people decorating trees for the holidays, this safety detail is more important than ever. In addition to keeping trees watered daily, John Drengenberg, consumer affairs manager for UL, reminds consumers to dispose of them after four weeks.

On average, real and artificial Christmas trees are the first items ignited in an estimated 210 home fires annually, according to the most recent NFPA statistics. While this represents a small portion of the estimated 85 million households that display a tree, consumers need to commit to taking care of a fresh tree, and keep flame sources away from plastic trees, to reduce the risk of their being involved in a home fire.

Information provide by National Fire Protection Association, www.nfpa.org.

Guarantee System provides high-quality cleaning and restoration services for homes or businesses at an affordable price. When disaster strikes, we can help restore damage from fire, flood, mold, vandalism or pest eradication (wild or domesticated animals) to get your life back to normal as quickly as possible. Learn more about what we can do for you! Call (616) 451-0787 or visit www.GuaranteeSystem.com.

Holiday Stain Removal

The holiday season is time for food, family, fun and all sorts of stains on clothing. Here are a few tips on removing some of the most common stains you'll find this season.

Alcohol and Wine - Soak in a mixture of 1 quart cool water and 1 tablespoon vinegar. If stain remains, sponge with rubbing alcohol or detergent. Launder in hottest water safe for the fabric. If the fabric is dry-cleanable, be sure to tell the professional dry cleaner the stain contains alcohol so the proper cleaning methods are used.

Chocolate/Hot Chocolate - Rinse the fresh stain with cool water. Treat the stain with a laundry pre-treating product (such as Shout®). Wait at least 30 minutes then wash as usual. Rinse with the hottest water safe for the fabric.

Coffee and Tea - Soak in cool water, work in 1 teaspoon of liquid detergent and 1 tablespoon of vinegar. Do not use soap; it could make the stain permanent.

Cranberries - Soak in cool water for 30 minutes or overnight. Work in a detergent. Then force extremely hot water through the stain by putting the stain over a bowl in the sink and pouring water through it. Launder in hottest water safe for the fabric.

Eggs and Eggnog - Rinse the fresh stain in cold water. Apply oxygen bleach and soak for 30 minutes in warm water. Launder in warm water. Do not use hot water; it can set the stain.

Turkey Fat - Rinse fresh stains in cool water. Saturate the area with an aerosol pretreatment laundry stain remover. Wait for a minute and launder with detergent. Wash in the hottest water safe for fabric.



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This issue of Neighborhood News brought to you by:



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