



# A Gorgeously Greener Holiday

## Fresh Thinking About Décor

by Avery Mack

Nature's holiday decorations can transcend cliché pine wreaths or farmed trees to make highly personalized indoor décor that supersedes traditional greenery. Yet mistletoe, holly leaves and berries, eucalyptus, poinsettias, tree needles, acorns and a cut tree's water reservoir can be harmful to both pets and children. Here are some better choices.

### The Tree

For smaller spaces or to make a statement, try grouping topiary trees of varying heights draped with solar twinkle lights and small ornaments or fresh flowers to create a focal point in a bay window.

"A lemon-lime cypress lends another burst of unexpected color on an entry hall table," says freelance floral designer Janet Corrao, in Nutley, New Jersey. "It smells good, too." Plants six inches tall work well. Corrao suggests setting the pots in colorful, inexpensive metal buckets from craft stores for added glamour.

Unless deemed a hazard to active kids or pets, set up a mid-sized stepstool on a table or open a six-foot

ladder in a corner and hang ornaments down the center space; add garlands and lights and set potted flowers and small gift boxes on the steps. Search "alternative Christmas trees" at [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com) for more ideas.

Another option uses hedge-like plants in lieu of a tree. Consider an English or Japanese boxwood plant or evergreen lilly pilly, and then trim to the desired size and shape. Plant it outdoors as weather and climate permit.

### The Table

"While we were working on a photo shoot, the photographer decided to include a Christmas scene. I was able to add fresh greenery from the property to the red ornaments and white orchids that I'd brought along. It made a striking centerpiece running the entire length of the table," says florist Angie Zimmerman, of Angie Zimmerman Designs, in El Dorado Hills, California. "For the fireplace mantel I used branches with red berries to add height on either side of the central mirror and then duplicated the centerpiece design between them."

A festive table can be dressed with appealing edibles. Use a bread wreath



photo courtesy of Angie Zimmerman Designs

## The Front Door

"I love to use pine cones for centerpieces," Corrao says. "Our weather is cold enough that I don't have to worry about bugs when collecting cones in the neighborhood." For warmer climates, bake the pine cones for 30 minutes in a 200-degree oven to melt excess sap, kill insects and fully open them.

Sold online or in kitchenware stores, a bay leaf wreath offers cheer at the door. After the holidays, hang it in the kitchen for easy access. "Kumquats, lemons, tangerines, small oranges and crabapples add color to green wreaths," notes Corrao.

## Garlands

For many, Christmas demands the smell of fresh pine boughs. Spice up the traditional greenery with carnations or other light-hued flowers colored with the juices of fresh, canned or frozen fruits and veggies—red from cranberries, beets and cherries; yellow and orange from yellow onions and carrots; purple from blackberries; green from spinach; pink from strawberries; and blue from red cabbage or blueberries. Freshly cut the flower stems and put them in the liquid from crushed produce or the can to absorb color. Hang garlands out of reach of young children and pets.

Navjot Kaur, of Navjot Designs, in Chicago, says, "We all have greenery in our yard or patio gardens that can be used for the holidays. It's fun to alter the design based upon what is available."

Imagination and inspiration can spark new, greener traditions.

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as a base and stud it with skewered basil leaves, cherry tomatoes and small balls of fresh mozzarella cheese for an easy, self-serve, Caprese appetizer. A colorful dish of balsamic dressing or another dip in the center, along with small plates and holiday napkins, completes the offering.

For a sit-down dinner variant, place a few Caprese skewers in small, clear, glass vases along the table with individual finger bowls of dip. Flat-leaved green parsley sprigs add another special touch. Zimmerman further suggests using deep-red Roma apples, cored, as candle holders.

Make living place cards with small pots of herbs. Chalkboard paint identifies the plant and guest seating. Also consider colorful painted pots sporting a small cactus.

Transform oranges into aromatic pomanders by scoring the rinds with a citrus stripper in a spiral, circle or other pattern. Use a small nail to make holes and stud the fruits with whole cloves. Adding seasonal greenery and sterilized pine cones makes a beautiful and fragrant centerpiece.