

Holiday Decorating with Herbs

Many of us complain that the holidays stress us out. Shopping, pushing through crowded malls, wrapping gifts, baking cookies, attempting to tackle that dreaded mountain of Christmas greeting cards that needs, to be sent out, entertaining...and the list goes on. Who has time for decorating the house?

You do!

In fact, it's just what you need to relax, But first, send your devoted husband off to work and your darling children off to school.

Then...bolt the door, make yourself a cup of steaming hot tea, turn on your favorite Christmas CD, and take a few moments to shift gears.

The Christmas holidays can get out of hand, but only if we let them. Spend the day turning your home into a warm, relaxing and inviting gathering place for family and friends over the holidays. Make it a refuge instead of a battleground for stress, a destination point instead of a revolving door.

To help you out, walk to your garden bed outside, and see if you still have some green herbs or perennials - the tough ones that are hanging on until the bitter end! Maybe you repotted some herbs from the garden in fall and brought them in to overwinter on one of your sunny, kitchen windowsills. Or maybe there are some fragrant, dried herbs and flowers hanging in your attic. Any or all of these will help you with the following projects.

Fresh Rosemary Christmas Tree

Rosemary is considered to be the most important of all the herbal plants in its connection to Christmas.

According to legend - and remember, a legend is a story that is handed down through the years and connected with some real events, but it is not true in itself - all rosemary bore white flowers until the shrub offered shelter to Joseph, Mary, and Baby Jesus during their flight to Egypt to escape from the evil death decree of King Herod. Exhausted and dirty, the family took refuge in a thick stand of rosemary on the banks of a brook in order to spend a day and night resting and laundering clothes.

After a good night's sleep, Mary washed Jesus' swaddling clothes and her own cloak in the brook. She spread the washed garments on the thick, soft, fragrant branches of the flowering rosemary to dry. When the garments were removed, the white flowers had changed to the soft blue of Mary's cloak. The swaddling clothes of Jesus retained the clean, refreshing scent of rosemary.

This legend prompted mothers in the Middle Ages to slip a sprig of rosemary into their babies' cradles so the children might have sweet and peaceful sleep. To this day, rosemary usually bears blue flowers, although an occasional white or pink can still be found.

The following 12-inch Christmas tree is made from sprigs of rosemary and can be used as a dramatic centerpiece, as well as a focal point, on a table in your entryway.

1 pound fresh rosemary, cut into 3-4 inch sprigs
2 blocks of floral oasis for fresh flowers, standard size (8 inches tall)
Curved plastic dish that can hold water

Stand blocks of oasis next to each other vertically. Put a stick through the center to hold the 2 pieces together. With a knife, shape the blocks like a Christmas tree. Place floral oasis in the dish and wet it.

Beginning at the bottom and going around the oasis, push in sprigs of rosemary at 45° angles, working up to the top. When finished, water again, and then decorate with rose hip berries, small ornaments, or strings of cranberries.

Your rosemary Christmas tree will stay fresh longer by watering and keeping it in the refrigerator at night.

Tabletop Herbal Advent Wreath

You will need 3 purple candles and 1 pink candle. The pink candle is lit the fourth Sunday of Advent to express our joy that Christmas is near.

Arrange the following herbs, flowers, and the candles on a circular wreath base. A white candle may be placed in the center of your wreath at Christmas to symbolize that Christ is now here.

Fresh and dried herbs and flowers include:

Sage- for immortality
Rosemary- for remembrance
Rue- for repentance and grace
Lavender- for purity
Thyme- for the bravery of the Christ Child
Juniper- for life and hope

To add color:

Yarrow
Cockscomb
Statice
Tansy
Bittersweet

Fragrant Fireplace Bundles

An assortment of dried flowers and herbs still on the stems
Brown jute or raffia

You can bundle up these little mini-logs of assorted dried flowers and/or herbs to add fragrance to fires in the fireplace. Simply gather an assortment of dried flowers and/or herbs still on their stems. Make into bunches about 8 inches long and as thick as your fist. Tie each bundle with brown jute or raffia. When your fire is smoldering, top with a flower log and enjoy the fragrance.