

## Decorations and Holiday Gifts from Nature

The Druids believed that placing evergreen boughs indoors during the winter months provided a safe haven for the tree spirits. The tree spirits were offered fruits, spices, and small edible items. In exchange they ensured that nature would be kind to humans.

The holiday season is an exciting and festive time of year. It is a time during which we welcome family and friends into our home and a time for giving. Individually created decorations and gifts truly express the festive feeling of the holiday season. The giving of gifts is the way we share the spirit of good will.

Here are some ideas for gifts besides the usual jams and jellies. Use your imagination and creativity in order to reflect the ancient Druid beliefs and ensure a safe haven for the tree spirits!

### Blooming Christmas Balls

**Materials you will need:** Glass Christmas Ornaments; Bleach; Rubber Gloves; Cotton Swabs; Charcoal; Perlite or Sphagnum Moss; a Funnel; Tweezers and a Squeeze Bottle.

Begin with large glass Christmas ornaments of any color. They should be at least 2½ inches in diameter or larger. There must be at least a ½-inch-diameter chimney, so you can work inside the ball. Remove the metal tops and save them. Soak the balls for at least 8 hours in a solution of half bleach and half water. Wear rubber gloves when rinsing the balls. Swirl the solution around inside. The color will disappear, leaving a plain glass ball. Rinse them again and rub with paper towels to remove the last traces of color. Inside the ball, use a cotton swab or a bit of paper towel on a pencil to get rid of any remaining traces of color. Or, if available, use clear glass balls, to eliminate this step.

Next, mix a teaspoon of crumbled charcoal (the kind used in aquariums) with ¼ cup of soil-less potting mixture (perlite and sphagnum moss are a good mixture).

Place the ball in a cup while working to keep it from rolling around. Use a funnel to fill the ball about ⅓ full with the potting mixture. Working with tweezers, cover the mixture with a bit of sphagnum moss.

Select any tiny plant such as sedums, succulents, thyme, baby's tears, blue star creeper or moss and take a 1¼ inch cutting. Poke the cutting into the soil with tweezers. Make sure at least one node is below the soil. Mist the soil with a long-necked squeeze bottle.

Replace the cap and hook, and the ball is ready to hang in indirect light. Mist when the moss begins to look faded. The tiny plant will root in the ball, and your friends will be amazed.

### Festive Herbal Wreaths

A simple but elegant gift is an herbal wreath, either fresh or dried. The delightful aroma of herbs is a thoughtful gift for the avid cook. The wreath can be created with just herbs or any number of nature's creations, such as berries, cinnamon sticks, dried fruits, nuts, and even ribbons. So, capture the season's abundance with your own personal design!

**Materials you will need:** Fresh or Dried Herbs; a Base; Rubber Bands or Florist Wire; Glue and Any Decorative Items.

Gather together bunches of culinary herbs such as bay, thyme, sage, lavender, rosemary, mint, parsley or savory. Secure the herbs with a rubber band or florist wire. The base can be either plain or moss covered wire, plaited raffia or twisted vines. You can either make the base yourself or purchase one from a florist, craft store, or even pick up one at a thrift store or estate sale.

Attach the herbal bunches to the base. To add interest, include flowers, spices, such as cinnamon, vanilla pods or other natural embellishments.

Fresh material is easier to work with than dry. You can always make the wreath and then leave it to dry in a dark, well ventilated place. For information on preserving foliage, see [Preserving Flowers and Foliage](#), Garden Mastery Tips from Clark County Master Gardeners, October 2004.

## Cinnamon Trivet

**Materials you will need:** Plywood; Cinnamon Sticks; Glue and Felt/Cork.

The plywood should be 6 inches by 6 inches and 1¼ inch thick. Take 3 inch pieces of whole cinnamon stick, and glue the sticks to the plywood. Use a non-flammable glue (like silicone glue). Create any kind of design that covers the plywood completely and looks decorative.

Glue a piece of felt or cork to the bottom of the plywood. The trivet will release a wonderful cinnamon scent every time it's used.

## Cinnamon Bundles

**Materials you will need:** Cinnamon Sticks; Raffia; Seed Pods; Pine Cones; Berries; Eucalyptus Leaves; Floral Wire and Glue.

Tie a bundle of cinnamon sticks together with the raffia. Create a pleasing arrangement of natural embellishments. Glue them to the cinnamon bundle. Loop some wire through the raffia to hang.

## Citrus Globes

**Materials you will need:** Oranges, Lemons, Metallic Gold Craft Paint, Narrow Ribbon, Cinnamon Sticks and Glue.

Using a sharp knife, score around the peel of the oranges, in a spiral shape. Score the lemon skins lengthwise into equal segments.

Insert a skewer lengthwise through the fruits and balance them on a loaf pan above a cookie sheet (which has been lined with aluminum foil), so the fruit skins are not touching each other or any other surface. Put them in a very cool oven (110°C / 225°F) to dry for several hours until the skins are tough, yet still retain most of their color.

Allow the fruit to cool. Rub on a little gold paint. Glue a cinnamon stick horizontally to the top of each fruit. Loop some red ribbon under the cinnamon stick to hang the citrus globe.

If you wish, sprinkle a few drops of citrus essential oil on the globes to enhance their fragrance. Seal them in a paper bag, and keep in a warm, dry place for a week.

## Potpourri

Potpourri can create a tension relieving and friendly atmosphere. Using dried herbs a mixture can be produced that will scent a room delightfully.

**Materials you will need:** Lavender Buds, Rosebuds and Petals, Star of Anise, Lemon Verbena and Essential Oil of Lavender or Rose.

Mix together: 1 cup of lavender, 1 cup of rosebuds and petals, ½ cup of star of anise, and ½ cup of lemon verbena together in a plastic bag. Loosely fill small mesh drawstring bags with the potpourri and place the bags where the fragrance is sure to be enjoyed.

- Place in pillows, to release their fragrance when pressure is applied.
- Sew or pin into the hems of curtains to release their scent when the windows are left open.
- Use as sachets in drawers and closets.

Continue the magic of the holiday season by broadening the adventure of using the gifts of nature in your everyday living experiences,....”of flowers, spices, aromatic gums, resinous odor of tree barks, even wet or burning leaves, the acrid odor of wood smoke, and just the earthy tang of new turned soil all capture the memory and set the imagination roaming and the mind searching for adequate words of description.”

## Bibliography

Bremness, Lesley. *The Complete Book of Herbs*. New York: Penguin Group, 1988.

Bremness, Lesley. *Herbs*. New York: Reader's Digest Association Inc., 1990.

Eaton, Fiona. *Homemade Treats for Christmas*. New York: Anness Publishing Inc., 2000.

Lawless, Julia. *Heaven Scent*. New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 1998.

Simmons, Adelmia Grenier. *The Little Book of Fragrances*. Connecticut.

[Herbal Gifts](#). Retrieved July 25, 2005

[Preserving Flowers and Foliage](#). Retrieved July 22, 2005 from [http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm\\_tips/Preserving.html](http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm_tips/Preserving.html). WSU Extension Clark County