



Clockwise from top left (this page): Catherine gets to grips with a traditional Christmas wreath; simple table decorations made from bay leaves and crab apples; rose hip tree decorations



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Homemade Christmas

Award-winning Blackheath garden designer Catherine Clancy on how to make beautiful Christmas decorations using plants found in your garden

As well as the lights, the turkey, and the tree, Christmas decorations are so important for creating a festive atmosphere. So why not start the holiday season by using the treasures in your garden to make some wonderful Christmas decorations? Your garden may not seem the most obvious place to find materials, but once you start looking around – either your back yard or the local Greenwich area – you’ll see the possibilities in red berries, dried seed heads, winter flowers, twigs and brightly coloured branches.

Foraging for materials and turning these into decorations is a lovely creative activity that all the family can enjoy. You can make wreaths and pretty tea light holders and decorate your fireplace and table, supplementing the materials you have gathered with fresh flowers from your local florist. Greenery from your own garden will be fresher and last longer than anything you can buy.

One of the easiest things to make is a Christmas wreath. The simple wreath I’ve made here (pictured on the next page, top left) was made from silver birch twigs, clematis seed heads, hazel catkins and winter flowers, or you can create a

more traditional wreath (pictured next page, top centre) by covering a wire framework with moss, sprigs of evergreen foliage and anything else that takes your fancy. It’s simple.

First, take a metal frame (try essentialscompany.co.uk), bag of sphagnum moss (available from any garden centre), garden greenery, berries, string, florist wire and some bright flowers. Start with a metal frame, pack it with sphagnum moss and tie in tightly with green string or florist wire (step 1, pictured right).

Stick evergreen leaves into the base, until it is covered in greenery. Use glossy



camellia leaves, pittosporum, bay and Christmas tree trimmings (step 2, pictured below). If you are looking for a shortcut, buy a readymade base – most garden centres supplying Christmas trees will sell them.

Next, add in some mature ivy seed heads, sprayed silver for a touch of glamour. Lay the seed heads on a sheet of newspaper, spray and let them dry before sticking them into the wreath. Seed heads look even lovelier when sprayed – spiky teasel, sea holly, love-in-

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a-mist, even holly leaves. Add red berries for colour (rose hips or rowan; holly berries are lovely but hard to find – you could also use red chillies, tied together in groups of three using florist wire), pushing them into the ring in random clumps rather than in any pattern or order (step 3, pictured below). Add red roses for a final touch of glamour, as well as pine cones or artificial flowers if you fancy. Make the wreath as full and as



Opt for a basic, contemporary wreath (above left) or something more traditional (above). Pared down 'twiggy' trees (right) are proving more popular by the year

individual as you like – experiment! To prolong the life of the wreath, mist spray it every few days.

For a modern, paired-down Christmas tree (top right), secure some silver birch or twisted hazel in a plant pot filled with expandable foam. Decorate the branches with ribbons, baubles, spray painted pine cones, holly, berries and lights; or these lovely rose hip tree decorations (left), made by tying rose hips and berries into small bunches with raffia bows.

Making pretty tea light holders could not be easier. Saw 10cm diameter birch tree logs into sections 10-25cm long. Drill holes for the candles just larger than a tea light using a 40mm wood drill bit. Wrap a festive ribbon around the log for colour and light the tea lights.

Festive table decorations are such fun to make (pictured left). Use small pots, oasis, bay leaves, bunches of box and something bright like crab apples. Fit the oasis into the pots, stick the bay into the centre of the oasis, and use short box branches to fill the space between the bay and the edges of the pot. Skewer a crab



apple on a wooden BBQ skewer (cut to size) and push these little apples on sticks into the oasis to provide the colour.

Planning ahead for next year, start stocking your garden now with plants to use for future Christmas decorations. Winter is the best time to plant new shrubs in your garden, as they get a chance to get their roots down into the soil before the growing season starts next March. When gathering live greenery from your shrubs, remember that you are actually pruning the plants, so take care to remove material evenly and take clean cuts.

Catherine Clancy is an award winning Blackheath-based garden designer and an RHS qualified horticulturalist. Catherine has featured in the national press and on BBC TV. Her services include full garden re-design and makeover; border replanting and advice on gardening.

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