



Holiday

GIFT GUIDE III

Christmas Crafts and Holiday Decorating Ideas

10 Pinterest Worthy DIY Decorating Hacks for the Holidays

BY JESSICA ABELSCROFT
CTW Features

Craftiness is cooler than ever thanks to the proliferation of social media. The biggest upside to the increased interest in DIY holiday décor, crafts and food preparation is cost savings. Whether a novice, expert or something in between, here's how to create a festive home on a budget, so you can concentrate on the memories you'll be making.

Double up

"I try to use things that do 'double duty,' which means I can either use them for two holidays or I can eat them when finished," says Tracey McBride, the author of the "Frugal Luxuries" series of books published by Bantam. She decorates with glass bowls of apples, nuts, berries or rosemary, then uses them in the kitchen later. Inexpensive white candles can be used any time, in any room - they're timeless and make everything glowing.

Pick and choose

"Choose one room, or maybe the kitchen and one room, and choose one focal point to decorate and keep your collections together," suggests Kelley Taylor, author of holiday-décor mainstay "Holiday Decorating For Dummies". "Focus on one table or area or a fireplace. Don't spread Christmas around the room."

Get crafty

"Take old ornaments, spray them a different color and sprinkle on some glitter while it's still wet," suggests Shelley Wolson, author of "Budget Celebrations: The Hostess Guide to Year-Round Entertaining on a Dime" (Filipacchi Publishing, 2009). She also cuts up the cardboard tubes from wrapping paper and covers them with fabric or paper to use as napkin rings.

Color your home

When purchasing artificial flowers, Taylor says it's more economical to avoid poinsettias. "Look for the colors instead



of what the flowers are," she says. Roses and amaryllis can be used for a variety of holidays throughout the year.

Save stuff to save cash

Think of creative ways to use leftovers. "Say you buy a box of candy canes and you don't use them," Wolson says. "Glue them around a coffee container or [other] container and you've got a really festive,

cute way to hold flowers."

Reap what you sew

Wolson has a friend who turned her daughter's first-year Christmas dress into a stocking. "That way she was able to keep the dress and it was a really neat way to hold onto it," Wolson says.

Make a list, check it twice

"Keep a list of what's leftover, what you can use for next year. Print it out and store it with the box of ornaments," Wolson says. "While you're in the season and in the moment it's good to think of things you want to do next year."

Head to the kitchen

Create an idyllic holiday setting with a classic gingerbread house.

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Oh, Perfect Tree!

Everything you need to know to decorate the best Christmas tree ever

BY MATTHEW M. F. MILLER & ANNA SACHSE
CTW Features

Few holiday decorations are as symbolic of the season as the elegant Christmas tree. Lush, lovely and aromatic, it's the focal point of the most wonderful time of the year, and not just because it's the destination for scads of wrapped gifts.

"Real Christmas trees are symbolic of this season of giving and sharing and family gatherings," says Tom Dull, a Christmas tree grower from Thorntown, Ind., and president of the National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA). "Nothing says Christmas better than the fresh scent, feel and texture of a real Christmas tree."

According to the National Gardening Association, the most popular variety of tree is the Scotch pine. It's upward-curving branches, perfect for hanging ornaments, and resistance to dropping needles makes it holiday favorite. Also extremely popular is the Balsam fir, which is tall and slender with 1/2-inch-long needles, which makes this aromatic tree perfect for tighter space. Other popular choices include the Douglas fir (big and full with longer needles); the Fraser fir (perfectly shaped tree with dark green needles that appear silver underneath); and the Colorado blue spruce with its

iconic bluish-gray hue.

"Whether you prefer to select a tree as a family at your local choose-and-cut Christmas tree farm, or choose from a variety of trees at your retailer of choice, the earlier the selection process begins the better chance you will have of finding that perfect tree," Dull says.

When it comes to decorating your fresh tree, start by considering an overall color scheme, says Michelle Workman, a Chattanooga, Tenn.-based interior designer who has composed spaces for celebrities like John Travolta and Jennifer Lopez.

For traditionalists, traditional colors like red, green, white, gold and silver never get old. For a bold effect, Workman suggests trying hues such as fuchsia, chartreuse and turquoise. It can also be fun to create a theme, such as an "enchanted forest" with amber lights, pinecone garland, mini gold balls, owl ornaments and faux birds nestled in branches, says Nicole Sforza, freelance writer and former senior editor for Real Simple magazine. Either way, always start tree-decorating with lights, followed by garland and then

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Oh, Perfect Tree!

Continued from page 3B

ornaments, Workman says. Keep real trees away from direct sunlight, air vents, heaters and fireplaces to prevent premature drying and accidental fires.

Tree

Before buying a tree, touch the branches. The needles should feel soft and supple, Sforza says. It's also important that the overall color isn't faded, the bark of the outer twigs isn't wrinkled and the exterior needles stay intact when the tree gets gently bounced. Fraser firs are one of the most popular options, Sforza says. "They shed minimally and have a classic, conical shape and strong branches that won't droop with heavy ornaments."

Topper

Stars and angels are classic tree toppers. For something more unique, consider faux antlers or a thick satin ribbon tied in a bow, Sforza says. Think birds, too. Workman uses a colorful faux peacock to top off her tree.

Lights

"When stringing lights, start at the bottom of the tree and work up," Sforza says. To make taking down the lights easier, she recommends dividing the tree into three vertical sections, and then running the lights through the interior and exterior of the branches to add depth to the design. Consider using LED lights, which burn up to 80-percent less energy and give off less heat.

Garland

An average-sized tree (6 to 7 feet) will typically use



60 feet of garland, Sforza says. She suggests creating homemade garland out of beads, faux pearls, knotted

twine or rope, colorful buttons and satin ribbon. Keep the garland approximately half an inch thick for an elegant look that won't overwhelm the tree, Workman advises.

Ornaments

To give the tree depth, ornaments should be hung toward the inside of the tree and on the branch ends, Workman says. Place them where they won't touch the branch below. Keep from overcrowding by exercising restraint and occasionally stepping back to see the tree as a whole. Use ornaments that match the theme or color scheme, or personalize the tree with homemade decorations. Sforza likes to create ornaments using a glue gun and string to hang origami, family photos, baby shoes or old toys like Matchbox cars and wooden blocks.

Stand

An average-size tree requires a stand with a base of about 20 inches in diameter, Sforza says, and it should hold at least a gallon of water. Only plain tap water is needed; do not add bleach, aspirin or fertilizer, which can actually reduce moisture retention and increase needle loss. Before securing the tree in its stand, cut one-half inch off the base. A fresh cut reopens the pores that take up water. Check the water level daily to ensure it stays above the tree's base. "If the tree looks dry, adding hot tap water to the stand can speed up intake," Sforza says.

Floor décor

Embellish the base of a tree (and catch wayward needles) by draping the floor with an array of silk scarves in different patterns. Try luxurious velvet, silver organza or gold lamé fabric, Sforza suggests. Don't forget that presents are the best Christmas tree accessory. "Wrap them in fun colors that coordinate with the tree and incorporate pretty satin ribbons and dangly bits to make them extra special," Workman says.

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Welcome to the Holidays

Expert tips for adding yuletide cheer to your home's entrance.

By Erik J. Martin
CTW Features

In December, many homeowners focus on decking the halls, trimming the tree and hanging stockings by the chimney with care. But not enough emphasis is put on the pathway and portal to all this indoor holiday cheer, some experts say.

The solution? From the first day of Christmas onward, focus on making a great first impression via your front porch, door and entryway – with no partridge in a pear tree required.

“The front area is one of the most high-traffic, highly visible areas of your home. It’s where you really have a chance to impress,” says Glenn Bridges, manager of

Christmas Décor in Northport, Ala. “Plus, if you’re a person who enjoys spreading Christmas spirit, it can really make an impact in welcoming people to your home during the holiday season.”

Missy Henriksen, vice president of public affairs for the Herndon, Va.-headquartered National Association of Landscape Professionals, agrees.

“A beautifully decorated entryway will make a lasting first impression for your holiday guests and should not be overlooked as part of your holiday decorating,” Henriksen says.

Regardless of the climate or region, festively festooning your home’s front should be front-and-center priority in December.



“In an attempt to bring a white Christmas to sunny southern California, we drape our front porch and bushes with snow-colored garland and hang icicle lights from the gutter and windowpanes,” says Megan Zavala, Burbank, Calif., a homeowner who

spends at least \$100 every holiday season to decorate her home’s portal. “Our guests love it – they say they feel as if they’re going to a party at the North Pole.”

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sugar. All you have to do is add the wet ingredients and any extra embellishments to make the mix your own. If mixes are too much work, purchase refrigerated or frozen cookie dough. Include your own add-ins, such as nuts, white chocolate chips, bits of dried fruit, or crumbled candy canes, to give the premade dough a unique flavor.

• **Prepare ahead.** Many cookie dough recipes can be made and stored for later use. In fact, refrigerating a log of cookie dough can

make it easier to cut or handle later on. Spread out the bulk of your baking over two days and you might feel less taxed.

• **Try a no-bake recipe.** Creative culinary experts continually reveal their clever tricks, and many of these include no-bake versions of favorite desserts. No bake cookies come together in a matter of minutes, but still employ a host of delicious ingredients. Recipes frequently feature similar ingredients to traditional cookies, but rely on chocolate, honey or peanut butter as the setting agent to keep them together. Bakers may also like not having to turn on their ovens.



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Welcome to the holidays adding yuletide cheer to your home's entrance

Continued from page 5B

At minimum, devote attention to your door by hanging a wreath, sign or other holiday décor there.

"Make sure the colors you choose complement the door and the other colors of your home. Look for a wreath or swag that is not too small or big for the door," says Kristen Gasior, chief marketing officer for Balsam Hill, the Redwood City, Calif.-based makers of artificial Christmas trees, who says quality wreaths vary in price from \$70 to over \$200.

To amp up the Yuletide spirit further, spread the garland along with the good cheer.

"I'm a big fan of sweeping garland on banisters and railings and over arches and doors, especially garland with pinecones, sprigs of holly or ribbons woven in. If you're looking for the real thing, choose fresh cedar bough garland where you buy real Christmas trees," says Bridges, noting that the bona fide stuff costs \$50 and up for enough material to drape around a door.

For maximum effect that resonates from a distance, electric adornments in the form of string, net, icicle, dewdrop and projector lights can add illumination and warmth to your porch, door and surrounding real estate.

"Whether you're going for a multi-colored Griswold family Christmas vacation look or something more subdued and classic, it's better to invest in higher-quality LED lights that are more energy efficient and durable," Bridges says. "Try to use lighting clips, which make installation easy and are designed to work without damaging your home's trim. And remember not to create runs more than three strings long or to plug in strings of mismatched strength rated for different amps, which can be unsafe and short-circuit your whole display."

Plan to spend anywhere from \$50 to over \$300 for effective holiday lights you hang yourself.

Also, "plan out what you'd like your holiday lights display to look like before you hop on a ladder," which can save time

and prevent accidents, Bridges says.

For festive front door framing, consider adding a small decorative pre-cut evergreen tree, like a Frasier fir or Norwegian spruce in a planter, to each side of your door, "which sets the mood for your holiday festivities," says Henriksen, noting that a pair can cost upwards of \$100.

Additionally, "play up your hibernating window boxes and planters with extra flair by filling them with greenery like amaranthus, magnolia leaves, juniper, cedar, boxwood and holly and by incorporating ribbon and bright-red accents around them," suggests Henriksen, who estimates this project to cost upwards of \$50. "You can even borrow from elements of your own landscaping greenery."

If you're on a tight budget, consider a simple bit of DIY decorating.

"It's easy to save money on decorations by making them yourself and by stocking up on supplies throughout the year," Zavala says. "Buy inexpensive red ribbon at a local store and tie it into bows around your



railings, posts, wreathes and lampposts."

Think outside the box, and outside the ice skating rink, too.

"Consider reviving an old pair of skates by making them the basis of an outdoor planter or hanging them from your home's light post. Custom décor can provide warmth and offer visitors a glimpse into your hobbies and interests," Henriksen says.

Be careful not to overdo these merry matters, however.

"Avoid adding too many elements to your front entry, which should be warm and inviting and not cluttered or claustrophobic," Gasior advises.

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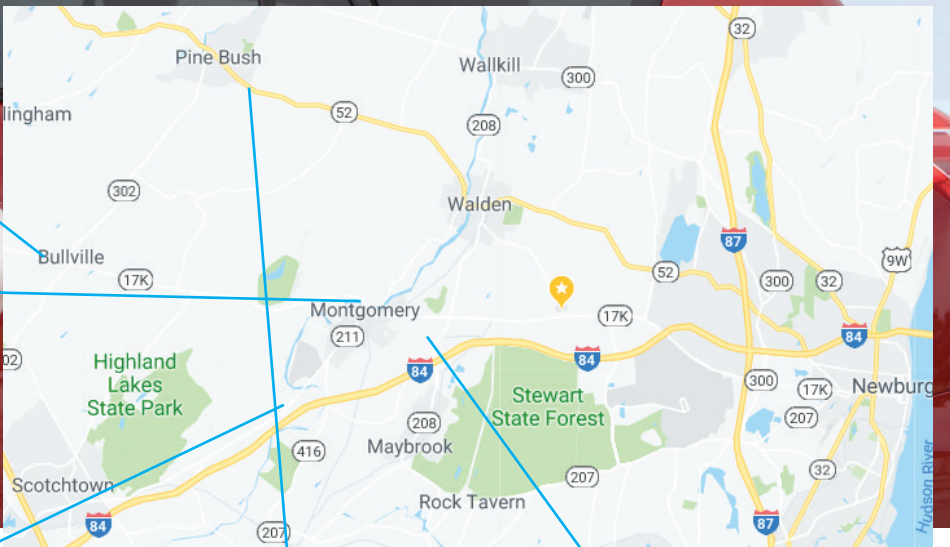
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