

ASK A MASTER GARDENER

Using garden greenery for holiday decorating

JANET BITTER
Master Gardener

Question: I want to use some of my own garden greenery for holiday decorating. What can I use and how do I make sure it lasts as long as possible?



Janet Bitter
Master Gardener

Answer: We are so lucky to live in an area where a lot of people living elsewhere depend on the plants that grow here in Oregon for their holiday decorations.

Besides the Christmas tree production in our state, there is a healthy cut foliage industry. Perhaps you've passed one of the holly farms east of Eugene or seen the signs when driving to the coast for evergreen bough collection stations.

Many of us may have something growing in our own yards that would make lovely holiday decor – or maybe a friendly neighbor who won't mind sharing a few of their own boughs.

It is best to harvest boughs after the tree has been exposed to a hard frost. The tree will be more in a dormant state, and it will be less stressful to harvest the greenery. In Oregon this usually means you could harvest as early as late October and all the way through December.

To encourage regeneration, cut the boughs 3-4 feet from the tip of a branch. Don't leave stubs but also avoid flush cuts

– you ideally will leave a small collar which will promote faster healing.

Commercial farms strive to never cut more than 25% of the live crown of any tree and rotate the trees they are cutting on, so they don't cut the same area more frequently than every three to five years. Of course, if you are using your landscape trees, you will want to be selective so as not to ruin the appearance of your plants. Usually, you can make cuts in areas that may be more hidden and out of sight.

We have such a nice variety of options to use that you can really be creative. Some of the more popular cut greenery options include:

- Port Orford cedar, incense cedar: very fragrant

- Noble fir, Douglas fir: popular for a reason.

- Blue Spruce: needles are sharp, but the color lends a nice accent; can be quicker to drop needles.

- Pines, including white pine: you can use scissors to trim pine needles to shape and the needles will not turn brown



PIXABAY.COM

Use foliage from your own yard to create holiday decor items.

where you've cut.

- English holly: never allow English holly to freeze after it has been cut or it will brown. Prickly.

- Others that work well as accents are boxwood, eucalyptus, magnolia leaves and types of junipers. Imagine all the foraging you can do to add to your wreaths or garlands: mistletoe, dried hydrangea blossoms, seed pods, pinecones, acorns and sweet gum balls come to mind.

Once you have your greenery cut, condition the branches by submerging them in buckets of cool, clean water. By cutting your own foliage, you are

already guaranteeing you have the freshest materials to start with.

An anti-desiccant spray can be applied after the boughs are conditioned and before you make your arrangements (holly benefits from this for sure). Make sure and spray all angles of the greenery to cover the surfaces completely.

The key to having your greenery last is to make sure to display it in an area out of direct sunlight and away from a heat source. If you don't have the most ideal location, consider moving it to a cool area (like a garage) at night. Misting your foliage with

water every one to two days will help keep it fresh.

Let your imagination be your guide. Hopefully you have way more creative skills than this gardener, but even I can usually do okay with the bounty we have growing here in our area. Happy holidays.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.