



Homestead Gardens

Davidsonville, Maryland

Decorating with Cut Live Holiday Greenery

In an era of technology, where virtual appears as good as the real thing, there is still a very strong appeal for the real thing. This is particularly true of things of the heart, which react to intangible qualities that only the genuine article will possess. This is true of holiday decorations, especially when they are from living plants and carry with them a tradition going back centuries or an earlier period of a person's own life. Decorating with fresh, living holly, cedar, fir, pine and boxwood are an essential part of celebrating this very special season of the year and of the heart.

The customary greenery used to decorate homes, businesses and public buildings during the Christmas holiday season evolved primarily from holiday traditions brought from Europe and those which evolved over the years in American beginning in colonial times. Almost all the live plant materials used now come from plants that can be grown in North America and so are readily available in local markets. Here are the categories of live holiday greenery that are available to decorating.

Garland/Roping. These are ropes made of woven or bound branches from both needled and broadleaf evergreen plants. They are used to drape both indoors and outdoors in such places as around windows & doorways, down the banisters of stairs, and around & between posts. The various plant foliage creates a variety of natural textures and fragrances. They are usually sold by the yard or in pre-cut length rolls.

White Pine - Roping that has a brushy texture of long, fine, light bluish-green needles. Native to the eastern US, this is the most readily available garland material at reasonably low cost. The needles emit the scent of natural pine.

Douglas Fir - Common to the Pacific Northwest area of the country, the Douglas Fir is a coarse, medium green needle conifer that emits a spicy, slightly citrus-like fragrance.

Fraser Fir - Grown in the northeast US and higher elevations of the mid-Atlantic states. Shorter, deep green needles with silver undersides, the Fraser roping is dense and emits a wonderful evergreen scent.

Cedar - This roping is made from the boughs of the Port Orford Cedar, which is native to the coastline of the Pacific Northwest. The lovely soft fan foliage is in a medium green, deeply scented in the musky fragrance that is uniquely cedar.

Fraser Fir, Pine & Boxwood - This mixed foliage roping combines three traditional types of holiday greenery that have totally different textural qualities alternating along the garland. The smooth thin lines of the white pine needles in soft green mixed with the thick, deep green, short needles of the Fraser Fir, and the clusters of round, dense, dark green boxwood leaves, stands out to be noticed.

Cedar and Douglas Fir - This garland is a combination of two fragrant evergreens of different scents and texture. The flowing swaths of cedar foliage in medium dark green, contrast the medium green needles of the Douglas Fir. The heady scent of musky cedar and fruity Douglas will be both attractive to all the senses.

Princess Pine/Crow's Feet - One of the loveliest garlands for a very soft and thin roping. The plant is actually a club moss that runs just below the surface of the soil in the shady wooded part of the Appalachian Mountains. The beautiful light, mossy green color is enchanting, and contrasts with the darker green of most other evergreen foliage.

Wreaths. Traditionally hung on doors, the doughnut-shaped wreaths of various types of greenery, often decorated with colorful fruit, cones, glass ornaments and ribbon bows are one of the most recognized symbols of the Christmas season.

Balsam Fir - The Balsam is an American favorite, as a Christmas tree and for wreaths. Of all of the evergreens used for holiday decorating, the Balsam arguably has the best evergreen scent of any conifer. These wreaths are unique, in that they are usually double-sided, with fully dressed with foliage on both sides of the wreath.

Concolor Fir - This fir has very long, curling needles of a silvery green, giving it a more coarse texture. But it is the scent that is its most unique quality. The fragrance of the needles is citrus-like, that of oranges.

Noble Fir - True to its name, the Noble Fir is an aristocrat among firs, with thick, soft, silvery-green needles that make exceptionally beautiful wreaths. However, it does not have the typical evergreen scent. When crushed, the needles give off a scent that is likened to a carrot.

White Pine - The long, bluish-green brushy needles gives the wreaths a pinwheel effect as it appears to be spinning. Easy to decorate, it is a true American tradition.

Juniper - A very different greenery that looks good mixed with other greenery and by itself as a wreath. The fine, bushy foliage in silver-blue is a stand out in color, and it is enhanced by its cluster of small, round, silvery-blue berries. It has a unique fragrance, that of sandalwood, which makes it a stand out wreath.

Princess Pine/Crow's Feet - These wreaths may be small in size, but very nice in any delicate holiday design. This moss forms a ring of soft, feathery foliage in a fresh, mossy-green color, that turn to an olive-green.

Boxwood - The boxwood's dense, deep-green foliage makes wreaths that are easy to decorate and display many types of decorations and ribbon bows. The use of boxwood in Christmas decorations is an early-American tradition brought from Great Britain, and is still a popular theme in many homes in the mid-Atlantic region.