Decorating for the Holidays with Traditional Plants

Every year before Thanksgiving poinsettias, Jerusalem cherry, crown of thorns, and other colorful potted plants are available in stores and garden centers to be used for seasonal holiday decorating. There are lots of plants to choose from, and one is only limited by her imagination of the possibilities. Red and green are traditional color combinations. While the bracts of early poinsettias were red and the leaves green, today, every combination of pink, red, ivory and white variations on those bracts can be found. The actual poinsettia flowers are the little yellow inflorescence or cyathium in the middle. Amaryllis and paper whites are also holiday favorites, purchased as bulbs for forcing indoors or already blooming. Bulbs may be sold with instructions for planting, planters and potting media.

Other plants popular for gifts or floral displays are orchids, cyclamen, hyacinth, kalanchoe, ivy, ferns, and Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti.

Of all the senses awakened at this holiday time, smell is very likely to come inside with plants as well as food brought into the house. Christmas trees, rosemary topiaries, wreaths, and garlands all have special smells that may be herbal, sweet or piney. Hyacinth and narcissus may have an unpleasant effect on someone with allergies and should be used with consideration to family or guests in the house.

Many species of hollies have attractive red berries that can add color for the holidays.
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Many houseplants are toxic. Care should be given to insure that any ornamental plant is kept well out of reach of children and curious pets. Holly and mistletoe berries are very poisonous, and even if a berry or seed pod weren’t poisonous it could still cause choking. House plants including poinsettia
may contain a milky substance called latex which can cause skin irritation.

Branches of evergreen conifers can be clipped to use with indoor decorations.

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Many native and ornamental plants can be used for holiday decorating including cedar, pine, podocarpus, smilax, holly, boxwood, magnolia, Leyland cypress, and arborvitae. These greens should be cut and soaked overnight in water to keep them fresh indoors longer. Spritz wreaths every few days with a water from a spray bottle. There are oils and waxes in and on the leaves and needles of holiday greenery. For safety, keep them well away from candles and heaters. Battery operated LED votive candles are available now, and they should easily last a whole season. Seed pods and cones can be strung on the tree or spray painted silver or gold for swags and wreaths. Broomsedge, grapevines and sweet grass can be twisted and woven into those swags and wreaths. Fresh fruits, citrus, and nuts are also good to have out for your “edible” decorations. Happy Holidays and please check out the Clemson Home and Garden website for other tips and safety for your Holiday decorating.

HGIC 1750 Selecting a Christmas Tree
HGIC 1751 Living Christmas Trees
HGIC 1752 Safety Tips for Enjoying Your Christmas Tree
HGIC 1753 Holiday Decorating With Fresh Greenery
HGIC 1561 Poinsettia

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