

## CREATE A CHRISTMAS WREATH



Wreaths are a lovely way to enhance the festive atmosphere in your home, welcoming Christmas visitors at your front door. They are quite simple to make and most of the materials are freely available.

- You will need a wire frame made from two circles of wire looped together or a length of wire mesh (rolled into a sausage shape and bent to form a circle) or a ready-made wire ring from your local florist; florist wire; some greenery (ivy, laurel leaves, leylandii, Lawson's cypress and holly work well); and berries, cones and seedheads.

- First attach a length of florist wire securely at the top of the frame to hang your wreath.
- Cut small bunches of foliage to 25cm (10in) lengths and wrap a piece of wire around the lower end of the bunch. Attach the foliage to the ring with another piece of wire. Keep repeating the

procedure a little further down the frame, ensuring the bunches overlap, leaving no obvious gaps.

- At first you may find the foliage slides around a little, but the more you add, the more stable it will become. Keep your work flat on a tabletop to prevent movement.
- For a really full wreath, fill both the inner and outer parts of your frame with foliage. The more you add, the better it will look.
- Attach your decorations by twisting wire around the base of the cones, berries and seedheads. Twist the ends firmly together and push the wire into the wreath frame. Secure by twisting the ends again at the back of the wreath.
- Finally, attach the finished wreath to a nail on your front door for all to see and admire.
- You can create beautiful natural garlands in a similar way. Use florist wire to attach overlapping bunches of evergreens and decorations to a length of rope.

Attach evergreen stems to a length of rope to create a natural garland

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Tape measure
- Christmas tree
- Christmas tree stand or bucket of pebbles
- Festive plants
- Secateurs
- Greenery, berries, seedheads, pine cones
- Rope

For wreaths/garlands

- Wreath ring/wire mesh
- Florist wire

For more information:  
[www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)  
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## THE EASY GUIDE TO

# A GREENER CHRISTMAS



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## INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Christmas has been celebrated by bringing nature into the home. Far more environmentally friendly than synthetic glitz, plants offer natural beauty and wonderful fragrances. As well as the real Christmas trees and exotically coloured houseplants on sale at your local garden centre, you can decorate your home with bowls of pine cones or colourful leaves, twisted stems or teasels in a vase, garlands of ivy, holly and mistletoe, and natural tree decorations such as cinnamon sticks tied with ribbon and studded oranges. So for a greener Christmas, why not add a little natural country charm to your decorations – and get the kids to help!

## CHOOSING A REAL CHRISTMAS TREE

Selecting and decorating the Christmas tree is one of the key festive traditions, and nothing compares to the wonderful fresh pine scent, appearance and texture of a real Christmas tree. What's more, every tree that's harvested from Christmas tree farms is replanted and all parts can be shredded and reused, unlike artificial trees that end their lives in landfill sites. The traditional Christmas tree is the Norway spruce, but look out for similar trees on sale with better needle retention – like the Nordman fir. Just remember to give your tree plenty of water and follow our simple steps to ensure that your beautiful natural tree takes pride of place in your home this Christmas.

- Before you buy your Christmas tree, make sure you know how much room you've got to house it. Measure the ceiling height and width of the space and take a tape measure with you.
- Look for a green tree with no sign of brown needles. Check that the trunk is sturdy and straight and the tree has a good, even shape with well-spaced branches and no obvious gaps. Needles should stay fast if you gently run your fingers down one of the lower branches.
- Once home, place your tree in a cool, dry place out of the wind in a bucket of water until you're ready to decorate.
- Before you bring it into the home, saw 2.5cm (1in) off the end of the trunk.
- Place the tree in as cool a position as possible – ideally well away from radiators and open fires.
- Christmas trees keep best in plain water rather than soil or sand, which block the pores in the bark, so use a specially designed Christmas tree stand or bucket of pebbles.
- Top up with water with a little sugar added – you may find your tree needs as much as 2 litres (3 pints) a day.



## FESTIVE PLANTS

Flowering and colourful plants are always a joy to give and receive at Christmas. Their bright, cheerful appearance, especially those with red flowers, bracts and stems, lifts the spirits and epitomises the season. Follow our simple guidelines to help your festive plants perform superbly right through the Christmas season and well into the new year.

### CYCLAMEN

Cyclamen are one of the most charming winter-flowering plants with exotic-looking swept-back flowers in intense shades of red, purple, pink and white with heart-shaped, silver-veined foliage.

They are easy and rewarding houseplants, provided you meet their requirements – a cool spot (12-15°C) that's brightly-lit, but out of direct sunlight. Overwatering is one of the chief causes of their demise. When the compost surface feels dry immerse the pot in a bowl of rain water for 20 minutes then pour the excess away.



### CHRISTMAS ROSE

Said to have sprung from the tears of a young girl who had nothing to offer the Christ child, the Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) blooms in the darkest months of the year, making them a valuable asset to any garden.

Native to Europe, the Christmas rose grows 38cm (15in) high and bears single white flowers about 8cm (3in) in diameter from December to March. Grow in a sheltered position, in soil with plenty of added organic matter.



### AMARYLLIS

*Hippeastrum* or amaryllis is an indoor plant producing large, colourful showy flowers on tall stems in winter. Give plants plenty of light so the stems don't become too leggy. Support stems with a short stake to keep them upright under the weight of the flowers. After the blooms have faded keep the bulbs in a warm place and resume watering the next autumn.



### POINSETTIAS

Poinsettias have become part of Christmas symbolism and decoration. Their association with Christmas dates back to 16th-century Mexico as legend tells of a poor girl who had nothing to give to celebrate Jesus' birthday. An angel told her to gather weeds from the roadside and place them by the altar. Red 'blossoms' sprouted from the weeds and turned into poinsettias.

Their name comes from Joel Robert Poinsett, who introduced them to the USA about 1828. And even though poinsettias now come in different colours, the red and green classic is the most popular.

Poinsettias are easy to care for. To enjoy them as long as possible put them in a bright, warm spot, around 20°C without draughts. Do not overwater by leaving water in the saucer – water only when the potting mixture is almost dry.

### FORCED HYACINTHS

Bowls of forced hyacinths that have been grown in the dark to encourage them into early flower add a delightful scent to the home. To prolong flowering, place in a sunny spot away from draughts and radiators. Stand the pots on shallow trays of moist gravel.

Cut off the flowers when they die and give the bulbs some liquid feed until the leaves begin to fade. Gradually dry off the bulbs and plant them out in the garden to enjoy in years to come.



### CORNUS STEMS

Magnificent on sunny days in the winter garden, the fiery stems of *Cornus alba* (dogwoods) are ideal for Christmas flower arrangements.

For the best display of colourful winter stem colour, plant your cornus in a moist site in full sun. Allow to grow unpruned for the first year after planting and then prune right back to 5cm (2in) from the ground in early March.

