



When Joan entertains, she decorates her entire home with natural arrangements such as this pine cone garland on the kitchen fireplace.

Christmas open house is fun with planning

By SUSAN KAUFFMAN
Staff correspondent

NOTTINGHAM - Tomorrow is Christmas Day, traditionally a day for families. Little children enjoy staying home to play with their new gifts and adults enjoy the comfort and peace found in small gatherings of kin. This day is set aside as family day in the list of seasonal activities, but the weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day provide some time to entertain others aside from the immediate family.

Preparations of food and decorations, shopping for gifts, church activities, in addition to everyday chores, fill up the time in this extended holiday season. No matter how busy families are with their daily work and Christmas plans, they still have time to crowd in more activities than normal. They want to share their holiday happiness with friends and neighbors as well.

Time and energy often do not allow families to invite into their homes all the people they would like to for a meal or an evening of conversation. One suggestion for solving the dilemma of how to welcome many friends and relatives during the Christmas season is holding an open house. Although an open house is usually connected with a silver or golden anniversary or a family's moving into a new home, this informal style of entertaining in which many guests come and go as they wish over a prescribed time period provides flexibility and ease in handling large numbers of guests.

Lancaster Farming visited Mrs. Robert Rohrer (Joan), Nottingham R1, the day after she and her family held an open house for nearly 100 guests. Having managed three open house events in the last six years, Joan has had good experience and was willing to share many timely suggestions for planning, preparing, and hostessing such an activity.

Although this number of guests might seem unmanageable in a farm house, Joan explained that the open house format makes it fairly uncomplicated to handle that many people.

Mrs. Rohrer said she first got the idea to hold an open house after attending one at the home of a Lancaster County friend several years ago.

"When I saw how easy it was to have a lot of people in the house in one evening without the problem of dragging in a lot of extra furniture, I decided to have one for our family," she says. "In 1971 I held the first one, and started with a smaller number of invited guests the first year, I would advise that for anyone doing this for the first time. After the hostess has had some experience she can experiment with larger numbers."

"I like to give parties where I plan games and entertainment but the open house is a nice change from time to time," Mrs. Rohrer explained. She continued, "There is usually a good mix of people in your home at any one time during the evening and they provide the entertainment themselves in conversation. We invite Sunday School acquaintances, farmer friends, immediate family members and people we have recently gotten to know. We also invite the children's school teachers and Robbie's music teacher—the children also feel it is their open house, as well, since they have guests special to them also invited."

Joan and her husband Bob live on the family homestead near the Maryland border in Chester County. They farm 600 acres of grain and have facilities for 700 hogs. The Rohrers have lived there since their marriage 12 years ago. Joan is an elementary school teacher substituting in

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Enjoying a large number of guests during the holiday season can be simplified by open house style entertaining and buffet-type serving. In the pictures below, Mrs. Joan Rohrer demonstrates how she prepares for a holiday get-together with fresh fruit, greens, and natural decorations prevailing. Around her punch bowl, Joan places a fresh fruit "collar" decoration of citrus fruits and fresh Christmas greens. And, in the center of her buffet, she uses a hurricane lamp arrangement with candles made of beeswax and shellacked apples on a circle of fresh greens.



My Thoughts ... And welcome to them

Christmases on the farm have always been wondrous events. Nevertheless, year after year they try my patience to the limit as I'm expected to give up my childlike ways and consider the fatigued farm father.

As a small child, Christmas morn meant rousing Mom and Dad out of bed, which was no easy task, since Dad usually overstepped his bedtime by two or three hours on Christmas Eve. Accustomed to hitting the sack at 11 p.m., the head honcho found that his day only began at that time on the night before Christmas thanks to church services and toy assembly work.

Then, the next day, he seemingly refused to get awake even when my brother and I went into our most irritating, sing-songy wake-up call. Eventually, Mom joined in the conquest, rattled him awake, and down we'd go, all ready to tear into our gifts.

But, as we grew older, Mom felt it was time that we learned consideration for the farm father and we began having lectures like, "If you really want to help your father have a good Christmas, you'll let him sleep."

That one was hard to swallow. It meant lying awake for 180 minutes, counting off the seconds to each one until 6 a.m. hit. By that time, we were so tired and exhausted from the wait, that we'd savagely rip open our presents to get rid of the frustration.

Then, came the kicker. It happened on my 14th Christmas and I haven't gotten over it since. That was the morning Mom announced Dad was going to do the milking and the barn work before we opened our gifts -- that way he could enjoy Christmas even more.

Understanding as I was, it took all the patience I could muster to be able to wait the extra 300

minutes (or 18,000 seconds, if you want to get technical) until we got down to business.

And, now, to add insult to injury, my brother has left the ranks and joined the opposition. After going into partnership with the farm father, he also has taken to sleeping in on Christmas morning and doing the barn work first.

So, I've given up the ghost and now wait patiently. One day I might just defect to the other side and make my Christmases a lot easier to bear.