

She turns vines into wreaths

By Beth Hemminger
Staff Correspondent

NEWVILLE — 'Tis the season for wreaths that beam with good cheer. And Becky Francis, Dillsburg, is a producer of such good cheer. She makes gorgeous wreaths from wild grapevines.

Four years ago Becky began making the wreaths after a mere suggestion from her sister.

Becky remarked, "After I made several wreaths, from my own wild grape arbor, I couldn't stop making them. It was a real treat to transform the vines into a beautiful decoration for my home."

She begins her wreath making in the spring. She finds live vines and marks them for when she returns in the fall to begin production. She returns to her marked locations a month or two after the grape season is over in August.

She added, "Waiting until late September or early October helps to eliminate much of the shrinking that takes place after the wreath is made."

Becky is self-taught and has developed her own technique during the last four years. She

explains her technique, "I pull the wild vines apart and begin making the wreath by weaving and wrapping the vines around a piece of circular shaped vine."

"She builds the wreath in diameter and thickness by adding more vines and weaving and wrapping. The wreaths are built gradually and are not held together by string; they are held together by the interweaving of all the vines."

This wreathmaker adds her individual taste to the decorations by leaving the black tendrils remain on the reddish brown vines. "The tendrils are nature's decorations," commented Becky.

Becky has a unique workroom for her work. It is the outdoors. She makes the wreaths where she has found the vines—in the mountains, along fence rows or in the woods. She remarked, "It would be troublesome carting the vines home and I enjoy working outdoors."

After her first season of wreathmaking, Becky said her house was wall to wall wreaths. Her 81-year-old neighbor suggested that she peddle the wreaths at boutiques and gift shops

around the area; and she did just that.

Before venturing out to the retailers, Becky realized that the grapevine wreaths were virtually unknown on the market. She said, "I was confident in my product and felt I wouldn't have much trouble in marketing them."

Her premonition came true; the wreaths were accepted without reservation at several boutiques and gift shops. Also, as word of mouth spread the news of Becky's unique vine wreaths, customer orders became a major part of her business. To date, the largest customer order wreath she has made has been 25" in diameter.

Becky feels that the wreath's versatility has played a major part in their growing popularity. She remarked, "My imagination runs wild when I envision the wreath and all the different and unusual ways they can be decorated." She noted that homemakers can add peacock feathers, bittersweet, ribbons, lace, dried flowers, or anything that appeals to the individual.

"The wreaths can be used inside or out or as a centerpiece with a candle. The possibilities are endless," she remarked.

Becky added that the wreaths can be recycled. After years and years of wear and tear the wreaths can be used as firestarters. Becky laughed, "Several of my less-than-perfect wreaths have found their way immediately to the woodstove."

Becky discovered from her 81-year-old neighbor that the grapevine wreath is not a new and innovative idea of the 1980s, but was made in the 18th and 19th century as a holiday decoration.

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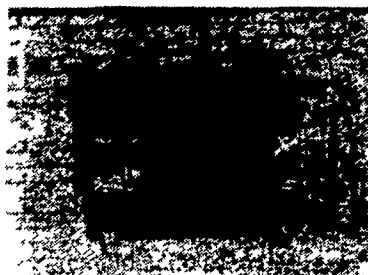
Wreathmaker Becky Francis, Dillsburg, ladens her arms with wreaths in preparation for a day of peddling her commodity from shop to shop. The grapevine wreaths, once an Early American holiday decoration, has been revived by craftwomen like Becky, and has become a popular item in many boutiques and gift shops.

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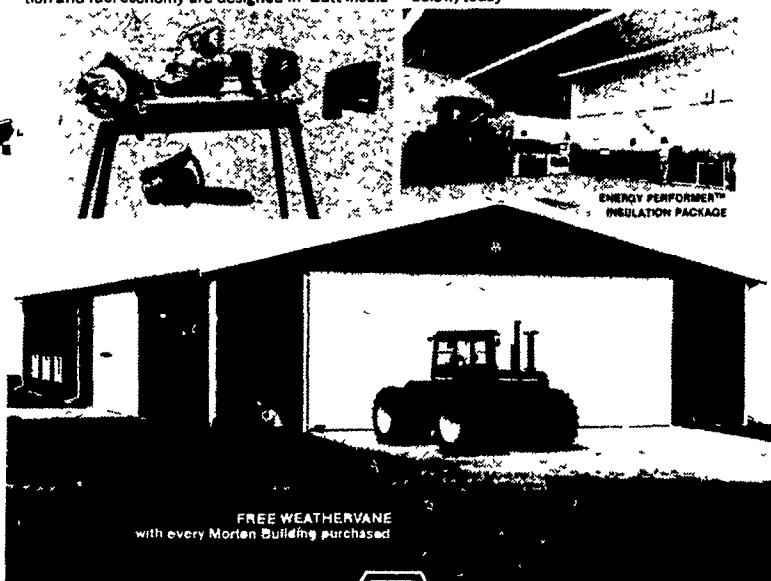
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