

Lancaster Homemakers Get A Headstart On Christmas Preparations

BY SUZANNE KEENE

LANCASTER — Christmas may be two months away, but it isn't too early to start making gifts and decorations. Nearly 700 Lancaster County homemakers gathered in the Farm and Home Center this week to learn new crafts to brighten their homes during the holidays.

Several local craftsmen shared numerous harvest and holiday craft ideas during this year's extension-sponsored Christmas in October program. Sue Miller of Apple Bin Crafts, Lititz, began the morning session with instructions for making Indian corn arrangements and holiday wreaths. Using several ears of Indian corn and a corn dryer purchased from a local Amish craftsman, she created a colorful doorpiece or wallhanging. Sue said she soaks the corn in hot water for 30 minutes before putting it on the dryer.

The dryer can also be used to display fresh or wooden apples, she said. A sprig of evergreen and a red bow add a touch of Christmas to the arrangement.

Sue had a number of wreath ideas to share, including instructions for making a green Christmas wreath on a straw wreath form. To begin, she cut her greens into 6- or 7-inch sprigs, which she attached to the form using pole pins.

"This goes quite quickly if you have your greens cut ahead of time," she noted.

Once the greens were attached, Sue pinned a smaller, wire frame, rounded side out, on the inside of the wreath. Then, she glued dried

apple slices to the frame using a hot glue gun. A bright red bow completed the arrangement.

Dried apples were the basis for a number of Sue's craft suggestions. To prepare them, she cuts the apples vertically into 1/8-inch slices. The thinner the apples are cut, the better they will dry, she advised. A single apple should yield 8 or 9 slices.

When sliced, the apples are dipped into a solution of 2 cups lemon juice and 1 tablespoon salt. To dry the apples, place them on nylon netting on an oven rack, set the oven at the lowest temperature (150°F.) and bake for 3 to 4 hours. Some apples may take as long as 6 or 7 hours, Sue noted.

The apples are ready for use when they are still pliable but have no moisture left when lightly squeezed with thumb and forefinger.

To create a dried apple wreath, Sue covered a wreath frame with brown floral tape. Then she applied glue to the form and attached the apples in a circular arrangement. Bows, baby's breath, cinnamon sticks, bay leaves and cranberries can be added for decoration, she suggested.

Cinnamon sticks formed the basis for another of Sue's wreaths. For this project, she cut a 13-inch diameter cardboard circle and cut an 8-inch diameter circle from its center to form the base. Then, using a hot glue gun, she attached 100 thick 4- to 5-inch long cinnamon sticks around the wreath base.

She added German white static around the wreath center, extending it over the cinnamon sticks



Among the craft ideas presented at Christmas in October were, from left, a Thanksgiving centerpiece made from a neck pumpkin, a dried apple wreath, and an evergreen and dried apple wreath.

and almost covering the outer edge of the wreath. With that complete, she glued baby's breath pointing toward the center of the wreath and finished by gluing colorful dried flowers onto the wreath.

"It's very, very easy. It just involves gluing," she said.

For homemakers looking for a smaller project, Sue suggested cinnamon ornaments. To make the dough for this craft, combine 5 ounces of cinnamon and 10 tablespoons warmed applesauce. Then knead the dough and turn onto a cinnamon dusted cutting board. Roll to 1/4- or 3/8-inch thick, cut with cookie cutters and poke a hole in the top of each for hanging. To dry, place on a wire screen for about 6 days.

Sue suggested purchasing cinnamon for this project in a bulk food store to save money.

Lancaster Extension home economist Doris Thomas shared quick craft ideas with the homemakers. She offered a few shortcuts for those who are too busy to start all of their projects from scratch.

With cookie cutters becoming increasingly popular, Doris suggested using them to create decorations. Using self-sticking ribbon, she covered both the outside and inside edges of a cookie cutter. The decorated cutter makes an ideal tree ornament, she said.

To add scent to the ornament, Doris glued fine nylon netting to one side, filled it with potpourri and then glued netting onto the other side. When the glue dried, she trimmed the edges of the netting to fit the cutter.

The ribbon-lined cutters can be glued together to form larger decorations, she added.

Mothers with young children found a friend in Sherry Kalbach of Lebanon County, who provided a list of 24 simple crafts for children. Known as "the garbage can lady" because she depends on "junk" for her crafts, Sherry said she does one craft with her young children each December day before Christmas. She calls it the Countdown to Christmas or Ornament of the Day.

Below are instructions for a few of Sherry's simple holiday projects for children.

• Animal Cookie/Paper Plate Manger — Glue three popsicle sticks on a paper plate to create a barn. Place a manger sticker in the center and paste two animal crackers beside the manger. A gold star sticker completes the scene.

• Dyed Rice Stained Glass Windows — Dye rice by placing it in a



Extension home economist Doris Thomas used juice glasses, cinnamon sticks, and a purchased wooden snowman to create these holiday containers. The wooden basket at right was purchased, painted and decorated at minimal expense.



Following her presentation, Sue Miller answers questions about her craft ideas. In the foreground is a dried apple wreath, left, and a cinnamon-stick wreath.



Sherry Kalbach of Lebanon County presented ideas to keep anxious children busy until Christmas. Here she shows a quickly-constructed nativity scene that children can play with.



Cookie cutters lined with self-adhesive ribbon make a simple holiday decoration. Here, Lancaster County extension home economist Doris Thomas displays one she made using Christmas tree shaped cutters.