

Time to deck the halls, etc., etc. Headed for church a few weeks ago, I knew it was time to start hinking holiday decorating. A couple of pickup trucks passed me, headed the other way, pine trees bouncing along on the backs. 'Tis the season ...

Not that I wasn't aware. Why, just the day before, I'd lopped off a few snippets of Norway spruce and hemlock, tucked them into a pre-used floral arrangement holder and poked a single red candle down through the middle of the damp oasis base. Viola! Instant holiday centerpiece for the kitchen table. Inexpensive, too, since the candle was also slightly used.

But seeing the Christmas trees flying by on the pickups was a reality check. I returned home filled with purpose and determination - and the realization that we only had two more weeks to get our children's Sunday School Christmas program pulled togheter... that I hadn't done any shopping.. or written a single card... or.. Phew!

Behind schedule already.

After lunch, I put in a request to use the pickup - which meant The Farmer had to juggle his plans since he also had need for the

truck. Much as I love my little compact car, it lacks 4-wheel capability. And between home and my destination was a muddy field road. No need to go "mud bogging;" the pickup was dirty enough already.

With a sturdy "limb-lopper" pruning tool, a smaller pruning shears and several plastic bags in my pockets, I trudged off in search of some holiday decorating inspiration.

Winds which had rattled our neigborhood a few weeks before had not missed the tall, old pines. Small limbs lay tossed about the ground, their needles still green but slightly limp. While I wanted an armload of the boughs of soft, fragrant needles, they needed to be fresh-cut, not storm-downed and already wilted. Trimming from a few low branches, it took, but a few minutes to gather a large bouquet.

More bounty was scattered across the ground. Fat pine cones, their edges iced with whitish sticky sap were plentiful. The plastic bags filled quickly as I crawled through the soft carpeting of old needles and dry leaves. A chilly December wind sang in the high limbs overhead and stirred the scent of fresh pine. Heaven must smell like a pine forest.

The quiet peacefulness of the woods and the fragrance of the evergreens were exactly what I needed. It wasn't necessarily the boughs of pine or the sweet, sticky cones, but that sense of peace away from the rush that prepares some of us to celebrate Christmas. And there it was, not in the stores, or the malls, or the lines - but in the woods.

The pine cones are piled, along with some shiny red balls, in baskets around the house. (And after seeing them priced at twentycents-apiece at a store recently, I'd found the mother lode, pine cone wise.) A bouquet of pine fills an old nail barrel on the front porch, with more of my pine cone wealth. The old grapevine wreath has a new wrapping of cherry paper twist ribbon. Candles glow in the living room at night - when I remember to light them.

We're getting there. For us, holiday decorations are done in few simple, seasonal, natural things.

If you're still looking for Christmas, steal a few moments away from the glitz and the gauche, the tinsel and the tinny, the high prices and the long lines.

Go to the woods. Go for a walk. It's a good way to get back in touch with the reaceful spirit of the season.

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## Holiday Plants Have Hidden Dangers

WESTMINSTER, Md. -Those decorative plants that adorn your home for the holiday season are colorful and festive, but they also pose a hidden danger to small children and pets because their leaves, berries, seeds, or roots may be poisonous. Although poisonings from plants in Maryland are rare and deaths from plant poisonings are even more rare, many plants have poisonous properties. Poinsettias, mistletoe, holly an Christmas-rose are a few of the poisonous plants identified in the Cooperative Extension Service's easy-to-read bulletin, "100 Poisonous Plants of Maryland." This 55-page booklet is a handy reference tool that can help you idenfity quickly and easily the most



address.

## Plateau Farm

#### (Continued from Page B2)

the trees, pruning and shaping. Janet does most of this work herself but utilizes the help from the rest of the family when necessary. She adds that her daughters have yet to develop the "trained eye" necessary to do proper "shaping."

The area's first major snowstorm came a bit early this year ----Janet had only finished all of the work with the trees two weeks prior to the big storm.

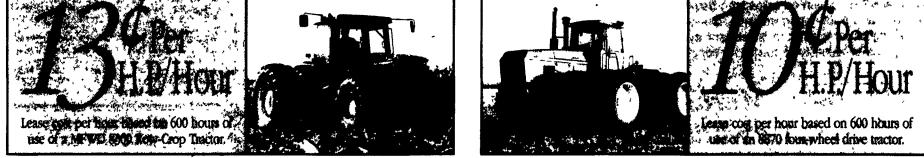
All of the operations at the farm are a concerted family effort in some way or another. According to Janet, "the girls are learning basic skills when they have to take over more of the daily household responsibilities that enable me to do the necessary outdoor work." Being outdoors is an added bonus for this energetic family. Janet feels that this accounts for the lack of stress in their lives.

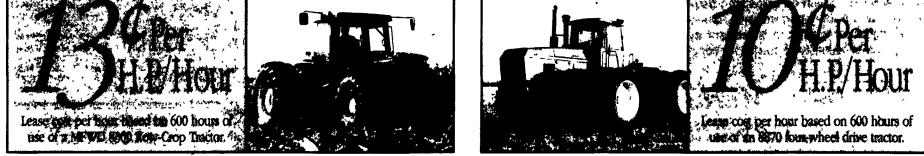
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