

Create Living Gifts This Holiday

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Plants and flower arrangements are always popular holiday gifts. Instead of purchasing them this year, create your own arrangements. Ohio State University horticulturist Jeanne Youger-Comaty gives the following hints for three popular and easy ideas.

• **Topiaries.** Topiaries are the latest rage in home decorating. You can create a variety of shapes by training any type of climbing vine around a wire form.

For a simple table-top Christmas tree, start with a well-rooted six-inch pot of ivy. Runners should be 15 inches to 25 inches long. Sink a 20-inch metal tree frame (that you buy or make yourself) into the soil as deep as possible. The frame will have metal rings evenly spaced up the outside. The first ring should touch the soil.

Take one stem at a time and weave it slowly around the frame in a spiral pattern. Tuck ivy around the frame to hook vine into place. After four or five days, clip off stems that don't follow the final cone shape. Repot the plant into a decorative container. Continue training the ivy up and around the frame until the tree is completely covered. Depending

on the size of frame, and size and type of ivy used, it will take one to three months for the tree to be completely covered.

Decorate your gift to match the season. For example, hang tiny ornaments or lights on the tree for Christmas or dried flowers for a centerpiece in the spring. Remember to water your gift adequately, prune regularly to maintain shape (snip new growth before shoots exceed 3 inches), and place them in bright, indirect sunlight.

• **Paper-whites.** Paper-whites might be the easiest bulbs to force into bloom. A cluster of the fragrant, white or yellow flowers makes a great centerpiece.

You can buy pre-cooled paper-white narcissus bulbs individually or already potted. Plant individual bulbs in a container holding water and either clean pebbles, gravel or marbles. The material should be pea size to a half-inch diameter. Use containers that are low, wide, at least three inches deep and without drainage holes.

Fill the containers two-thirds full with pebbles and push the bulbs about one-third into the gravel. Bulbs should not touch. Pour water carefully inside the container so that it reaches just below the base of the bulbs. If

water touches the bulbs they will rot. Add water as needed.

Place the container in bright light and allow several weeks to flower. After the flowers fade, the foliage will grow for about a month, but the bulbs are not reusable.

• **Terrariums.** These glass-encased gardens are great for small areas such as offices.

Containers can range from fancy glass bowls to recycled clear plastic liter bottles and salad trays. Use your imagination (or clean out your basement) to find the ideal container. If a container lacks a cover, use a piece of glass or plastic wrap.

Leaves or snippets of houseplants that grow well in terrariums include African violets, begonias, coleus, English ivy, jade plant and pothos. Other terrarium plants are dwarf maidenhair fern, parlor palm, creeping fig, baby's tears, prayer plant and dwarf gloxinia.

Clean and dry the container. Place a thin layer of small stones or pebbles across the bottom to help drain water. Cover the stones with well-drained potting soil. Slightly wet the soil. Both layers should occupy less than a fifth of the container.

Place non-plant accent items

such as seashells in the terrarium first. Make holes in the soil with an unwound wire hanger to plant the largest cuttings. Finish with the shorter plants. Never place a plant so it touches the edges; it will collect moisture and decay.

Lightly mist the plants and cover the terrarium. If water beads on

the sides, moisture is about right. If the interior fogs, remove the cover for a day to allow the plant to dry. Water the terrarium when the soil feels dry. Mist just enough to barely moisten the soil.

Place in bright light, but not direct sunlight, in an area that remains about 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Make Holiday Gatherings Simpler, Healthier

HONESDALE (Wayne Co.) — If the holidays are meant to be a time of joy and celebration, then why does the mere thought of family gatherings and homemade cookies make some tired and depressed? Why do the holidays cause resentment and anger, instead of friendship and goodwill, frustration and guilt, instead of enjoyment and thankfulness?

Often it is because of unrealistic expectations! We want to make the occasion special and we may have special people visiting. If the result is less than perfect, we typically are heartsick; sometimes to the point that we make our guests feel it's all their fault.

As you plan your holiday gatherings this year, put your expectations in perspective. Make sure the social and entertaining menu you plan is not so complex that you don't have time to enjoy yourself, your family and your guests.

Take time to decide on your social and entertaining goals and develop a plan to achieve these goals. Make sure you include the following three resolutions offered by the Wayne County Cooperative Extension Office:

1. I am not going to overwork myself.

Be kind to yourself! An

exhausted host or hostess isn't congenial company. When planning your menu, consider simple foods you know how to prepare. Consider what can be prepared ahead and frozen or held in another manner. Think about having a potluck. Also, if holiday guests stay over, don't be timid about serving leftovers or ordering out for pizza. A kitchen can seem like a dungeon if you're held captive cooking there day after day.

2. I am not going to overspend.

As you rummage through holiday recipes, keep your food budget in mind. How can you enjoy a dinner knowing a large portion of the month's food budget is sitting on the table? If served attractively, recipes made with common household staples and an occasional special ingredient can be just as elegant as those that call for many expensive ingredients.

3. I am going to serve healthful food.

A conflict often occurs when we entertain. We invite our friends into our homes as a way to express our friendship. However, if we serve them rich calorie-laden foods detrimental to their health, is that friendship? Wouldn't a clearer statement of love and friendship be to serve them good foods that also are good for them?

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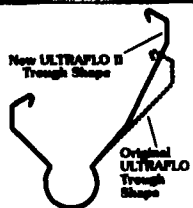
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