

Home Grown Holiday!

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

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“Christmas gift suggestions: To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, your heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To yourself, respect.” - Oren Arnold

The season for holiday gift gathering began for our family in the summer. It was then that we picked the peaches, pears, apricots, berries, and a cornucopia of vegetables to can and give to friends and relatives for Christmas. My sisters and I gathered wild flowers and colorful leaves which we pressed between wax paper creating our own version of stained glass windows. In November we would decorate the jars, adding hand drawn labels, and in December the baking would begin. Wooden boxes would be filled with candied and savory walnuts from our trees, wine from our grapes, preserves from our orchards, eggs from our chickens, garlicky tomato sauce from our gardens, and spiced cookies from our imagination. After collecting miniature pinecones from around the yard to mold into reusable ornaments, the packages were festooned with fanciful yarns, colorful ribbons, and a hearty greeting to be delivered with a smile. Every recipient received a present specifically designed with items we knew they'd enjoy. We all felt as jolly as St. Nick himself.

Over the years commercialism has taken over the season of giving. It's easy to zip into a store to purchase presents and have them wrapped and shipped. It's even less hassle to go on-line to order something for everyone on Santa's list. Yet, somehow, I am still drawn to the love, thought, and sweet individuality that handcrafted gifts exude. I enjoy meandering through my garden contemplating the gifts that are hidden within its boundaries and branches. Who will be the fortunate beneficiary of these heavenly delights? With the return to the earth movement in full swing, this December is the right time for you to employ a personalized home grown holiday.

Instead of cutting down a tree, start by purchasing a living evergreen that you can save in the pot for next year or if you have the space, plant for posterity. Let nature's winter wardrobe of berries and boughs inspire your holiday decorating. Evergreen trees with colorful berries include Chinese holly with yellow berries; English holly with red berries, North American native red cedar with fragrant foliage and frosty blue berries; and Brazilian peppertree with red pep-



Holiday centerpiece

Photo Cynthia Brian

percorns that are piquant in savory dishes. A deciduous merry berry tree that bears pink and aqua colored fruits is the pistache, a favorite food of squirrels, birds, and turkeys. If you have pines, redwoods, or other conifers in your yard, cut branches to weave into wreaths, centerpieces, and garlands, along with

pinecones, dried flowers, mushrooms, or other natural reeds. Decorate outdoor trees with strings of popcorn, cranberries, and rose hips that the birds will enjoy.

While poinsettias, paper whites, jams, jellies, and kitchen treats are always welcome, a few trouble-free gift-giving ideas inspired by the garden include:

- Holiday Napkin Rings made from bendable twigs
- Fragrant Potpourri
- Bay Leaf Garlands
- Rose Petal Sachets
- Lavender Bath Salts
- Aromatherapy Oils
- Apple-Clove Pomanders
- Herbed Olive Oil
- Pinecone Fire Starters
- Pressed Flower Greeting Cards
- Seed Catalog Journals
- Grapevine Wreaths
- Herbal Teas
- Infused Vinegars
- Potted Candles
- Terrariums
- Forced Bulbs in Glass Vases
- Seeds from your Favorite Specimens
- Birdseed Balls