

## Use your imagination and landscape to decorate for the holidays

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Published December 2, 2017*

This past week I spent time preparing for the Master Gardener Volunteers of Clark County to cut greens from my landscape to be used for holiday swags. Each year these volunteers make over 125 swags for patients at the Springfield Regional Cancer Center as a community service project.

Fortunately, many years ago I planted spruce and pine seedlings to be used eventually as a windbreak. As with so many things in the garden, these trees got away from me and grew so well that many of them were too close together.

Therefore, we are thinning the trees and using the greens for the swags. I am really thankful for this recent nice weather. The volunteers are usually cutting greens in the worst possible cold wet weather.

Cutting greens from the landscape is a great way to decorate for the holidays. When I refer to greens, I am talking mostly about evergreen plants that make great indoor and outdoor decorations.

There are also deciduous (lose their leaves) plants that make good decorations as well. These include willow branches from the corkscrew willow or the wavy branches of Harry Lauder's walkingstick as well as the colorful red, yellow and gold branches from the variegated dogwood shrubs.

I also like to use Russian sage, a perennial, in some of my decorations. The silver stems still look great and will last through the holidays.

Take a look at your landscape and try it. Be creative. If something doesn't work you can throw it in the compost pile.

There are a few things to keep in mind when using fresh greens and landscape cuttings for decorations.

Since they are live plants, they may not last a long time indoors and some last longer than others.

For instance, juniper and pine hold up better than Norway and blue spruce. Evergreens like pine, spruce, and juniper hold up longer than broadleaf evergreens such boxwood and holly.

Stems of the dogwood shrubs hold up all season. Deciduous holly with its incredible red berries will hold up through the holidays.

When cutting pines, keep in mind that the branches only have buds on the ends and not all up and down the stem. This is important!

When you remove the ends of the branches, with the buds, there will be no more growth on that stem. Be selective and remove pine branches from places that won't be so obvious.

You can always prune branches of trees and shrubs and spray paint them gold and silver.

I collected the fruits of osage-orange trees (hedge apples) and spray painted them silver and gold for a nice outdoor decoration. These eventually rot and should not be used indoors but will last through the holiday outside.