

Holiday Wreath with Native Plants

by Peggy S. Lantz

Several years ago I read about making a holiday wreath for the door from native plant greenery. I had to try it, and the finished wreath made a door decoration that was beautiful and distinctly "Florida". I recommend the concept to all native plant enthusiasts.

Ingredients needed are like grandma's measurements for cooking — a dash of this and a pinch of that. Select items from whatever native plants you have available and experiment with them:

- Spanish moss
- magnolia leaves
- Southern red cedar branches
- coontie leaves
- wax myrtle branches
- Palatka or dahoon holly
- wiregrass
- longleaf or sand pine cones
- sweet gum pods
- pine needles
- brown turkey oak leaves
- bushy native grasses

Begin with a homemade or purchased basic wreath form. I bought one made of straw at the crafts shop. Cover it with Spanish moss tied on with an inch-wide bright red or green ribbon. Smoke your Spanish moss (or spray it with insecticide if you do that sort of thing) to rid it of bugs 'n' things, or else do all your work outside and hang your wreath on the outside of the door.

Use florist's planter pole pins to pin on the moss and ribbon and other items.

Probably you'll want to leave all or most of the greenery green, but you might spray some of the pieces, such as the pine cones or the magnolia leaves, with gilt, or with shellac, to add gloss or to preserve them. The thick-leaved native plants last quite well, though they may begin to curl a little before the holidays are over. Possibly misting them every day would make them last a little longer.

Pin the bigger, heavier leaves — magnolia — on first, at what will be the bottom of the wreath, maybe two of them rising up the sides of the wreath with their stems together at the bottom; then maybe two more a



little farther up the sides. Inside the curl of the magnolia leaves, pin on sprigs of red cedar. Climbing up the sides of the wreath, pin on coontie leaves, and — wrapped nearly all the way to the top — tie, wire, or pin on branches of holly with red berries.

Trim saw palmetto leaves into pointed fans and stick them in at the bottom among the magnolia leaves and cedar. Wire or tape sweet gum pods or sand pine cones together and nestle them in the moss. Tie on a longleaf pine cone or two, and poke in a few pine needles or sprigs of wiregrass. Add a bushy grass inflorescence or saltbush sprig. Use turkey oak leaves and wax myrtle with

its waxy gray berries to accent.

Then add a bow if you wish.

By now your wreath is too heavy to lift, and your native plants bury one another! No, of course not! Instead you pick and choose and experiment, with what you have in your yard or can find easily. It's only going to take a single sprig of some items, and maybe two of another. But it is hard to stop, for it's a temptation to use a piece of every wonderful native plant you can find! Maybe you'd better make two wreaths — one for your door and one for a friend.

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