

Holiday Decorations with Native Plants

by Peggy Lantz

WREATH

Last December 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
- saw palmetto leaves
- 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. All or most of the greenery you'll want to leave green, but some you may want to spray with shellac to preserve them or add gloss, such as the magnolia leaves, or to gild them, such as the pine cones.

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 wiregrass. Add a bushy grass inflorescence or saltbush sprig. Use turkey oak leaves and wax myrtle with its waxy 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, 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.

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.



Peggy Lantz

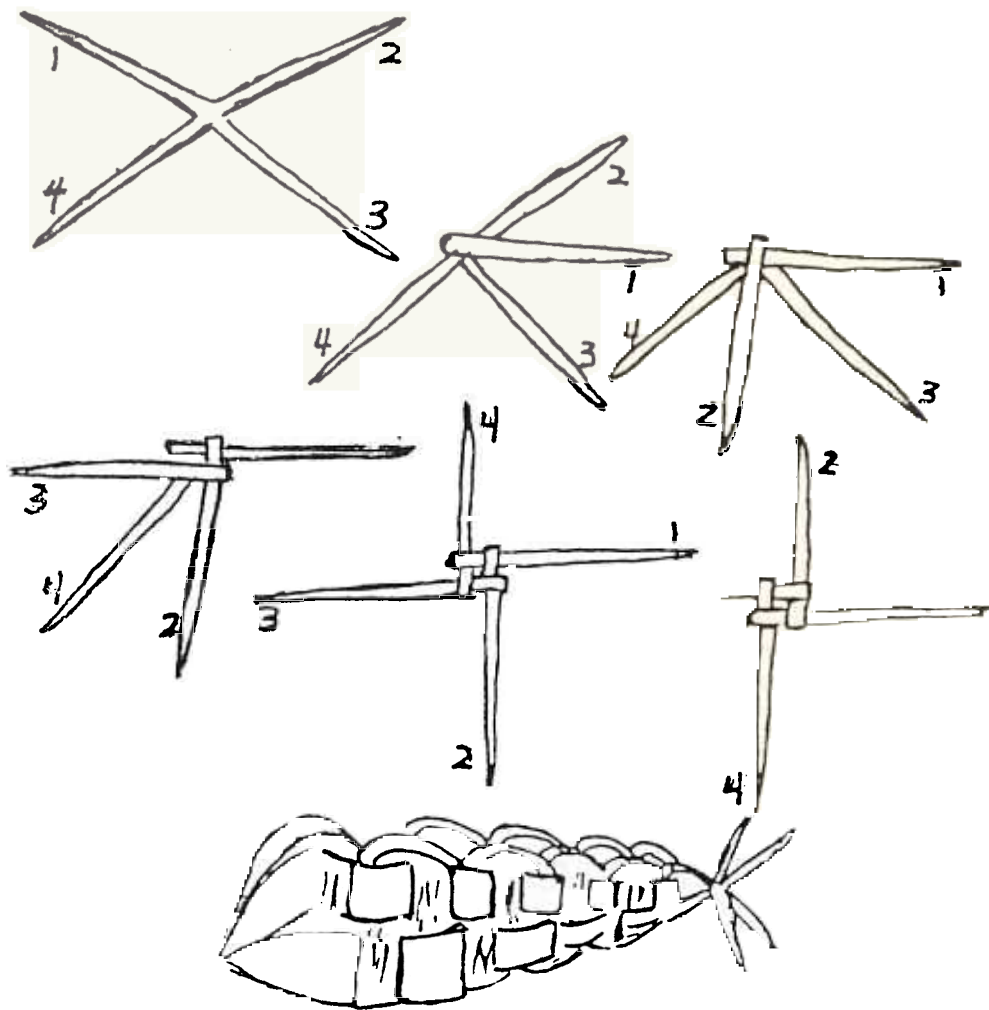
BOONDOGGLE

The Port Charlotte Garden Club is promoting the art of weaving palm fronds known as boondoggling. The dictionary says that boondoggling is doing something of little or no value just to keep busy, but since when has making something beautiful been useless? And a boondoggle made from a palm frond is beautiful.

Take one cabbage palm frond (for a large swag) or saw palmetto frond (for a small one) and split two adjacent leaves down their lengths. Begin weaving these four strips in a square pattern by folding one strip after the other back on itself, interweaving the fourth strip through the loop made by the first strip. (Follow the diagrams.) Snug the weave together gently, then repeat the process. When you reach the ends, tie them together with thread or fishline to prevent unraveling.

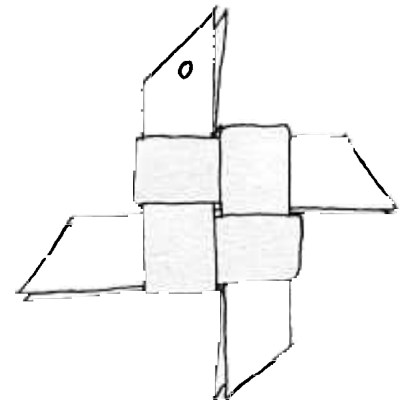
Then do the same thing with another set of two leaves split in half, until the entire frond is woven into little boondoggle tassels. Or weave several but leave some leaves long among the tassels.

The finished swag can be used in its natural state, or decorated with holiday ribbons and balls for the season. Add spray shellac and glitter, or gild some of the boondoggle tassels. Lay it on the mantel, or hang it on the door.



CHRISTMAS STAR

The Lantz family has been sending homemade Christmas cards for many years. One year the card featured a star made of palmetto frond strips, folded this way, and trimmed:



It was dunked in shellac for gloss and to stick the pieces together. A hole was punched in one point, a Christmas ornament hanger inserted, and the hanger taped to the card. Many of the recipients have included the star in their decorations for annual use.

