



Green and pleasant

DECEMBER can be a quiet month in the garden, but there are some things to take care of. With limited daylight hours as we approach the shortest day of the year, this month's crisp wintry weather can be strikingly beautiful and bitterly cold in equal measure. Check your winter protection and if you have a greenhouse make sure the heater is working. Hopefully there are not too many jobs left to do this year out in the cold so you will have time for some fireside garden planning and Christmas decorating too.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Outdoors, check your winter protection structures are still securely in place. Cold, wet, windy winter weather can damage trees, shrubs and garden structures such as trellis. Improving shelter, staking plants, mulching, wrapping pots and careful matching of plants to places will help to prevent this kind of damage. Meanwhile, indoors, read on!

Christmas trees

Have you decided whether to have a real Christmas Tree this year or not? We are being told they may be in short supply. Last year, due to the pandemic, I decided to order mine online, not really knowing what I would

receive. It has always been nice to go and see the trees and pick the one you thought was best suited to your home. I was so pleased with the delivered tree that I ordered again from them, back in October, and it should arrive this week. Last year, regular readers might recall, the tree and my Christmas decorations made it to a "live" broadcast on *ITV's This Morning* with Holly and Phillip. You can read all about this on my Christmas web site: www.geoffschristmas.co.uk

Natural Christmas decorations

Decorating your home for the festive season doesn't have to be expensive. In fact, it's quite easy to decorate with items that are virtually free. So why not opt for the simplicity of natural materials. A simple glass jar filled with branches and berries can be both elegant and festive to boot. If you use

the right kind of branches, you can also fill your space with a wonderfully fresh and Christmasy scent.

If you don't have the space for a full-size tree then go for a small container full of lush branches which you have collected while out walking or from your own garden, which can be a great alternative. Not only do they look good, but you get that natural smell of Christmas too. If you choose to hang ornaments on the branches try not to overdo it, as a display of this size will quickly become weighed down, both physically and visually. Choose a few favourites and use them sparingly.

Most people use cinnamon to add a little spice to foods and beverages, but cinnamon sticks also make wonderful and natural Christmas decorations. There are plenty of things that can be done with them including gluing or tying them around the outside of a candle, tying them together and hanging them as ornaments, and displaying them in bowls with pinecones and greenery. Keep in mind that when you use them in conjunction with candles the warmth releases some of cinnamon's wonderful aroma.

The rich red colour of cranberries makes for a perfect festive decoration. Whilst you will not have any growing, you should be able to pick some up at the supermarket. One of the best ways to display them is with candles. Simply fill a clear glass vase with cranberries and nestle a pillar candle within. You can also add greenery and pinecones if you wish. And if you really want to make an impact, make several of these candle holders and place them down the middle of your dining table to create a beautiful centrepiece.

One of the most common and traditional ways to make use of natural materials around this time of year is

with wreaths – especially evergreen wreaths. They're classic, beautiful, and work with any style of decor. They can be embellished with all sorts of ribbons and decorations too, but the truth is that they don't really need it. They're perfectly beautiful all on their own. If you want to decorate with natural Christmas decorations there's no better way than with a classic evergreen wreath. I've got a fair bit of holly growing in my garden, as in the header above and love to bring some into the house each Christmas along with the ivy I have growing all down the side of the house.

As a child, growing up in my parent's pub in the Cotswolds in the late 50's and 60's, we'd use holly and ivy to decorate the pub at this time of year. Initially I would help my mother and gradually took over. I used to spray some of the greenery silver or gold and mix this in with the natural colours. The lounge bar had a wrought iron frame above it and I'd intertwine the greenery across the whole frontage, creating a canopy of natural foliage. I'd then select a few specially chosen glass baubles and suspend them from the branches and delicately arrange a string of fairy lights across it too. It would look quite magical in the evenings. You could do something similar across a mantelpiece or table top!

Read more of Geoff's garden at: www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk

Geoff's garden, Driftwood has appeared on BBC2 *Gardeners' World*, was a finalist in *Gardeners' World Magazine Best Small Space* and a finalist in *Lewes District Business Awards 2018* as 'The Tourist Destination of the Year'. Read the amazing 5-star reviews on TripAdvisor. Amazing feature in *Coast Magazine* and an *American magazine, Flea Market Garden Style*. Read all about Geoff's trips to Buckingham Palace and Royal Garden Party in 2018 and his work for the community.