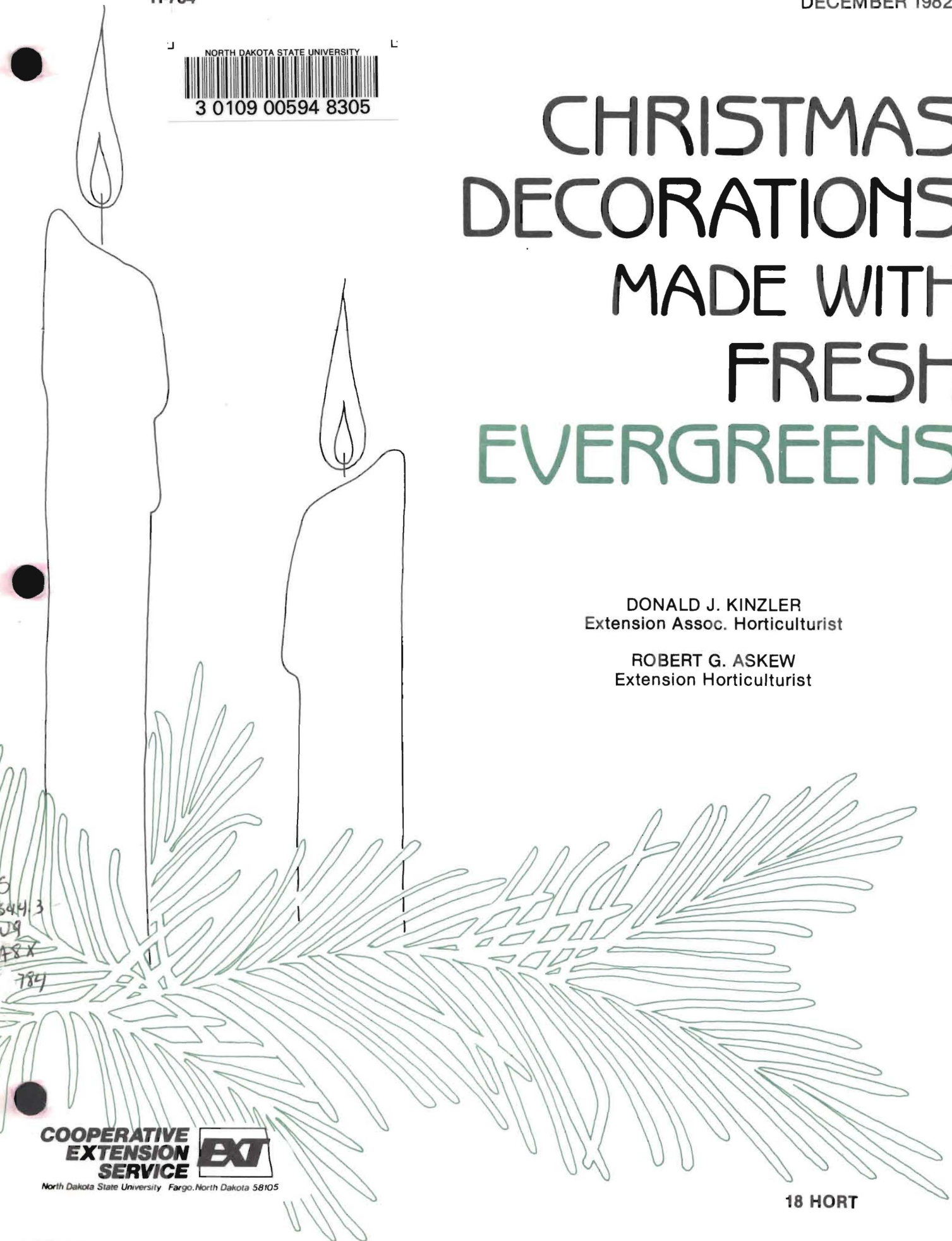




CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS MADE WITH FRESH EVERGREENS

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Christmastime can come alive with the inviting aroma of fresh evergreens. With a little practice, you can learn to make attractive Christmas decorations. Table centerpieces for a dining room table or coffee table will add holiday cheer. Fresh evergreen boughs may be used to construct brightly decorated wreaths and swags for your front door.



CHOOSING EVERGREEN MATERIAL

Many rural people have access to shelterbelts from which trimmings of pine, spruce or juniper may be obtained. City dwellers may do a limited amount of pruning on evergreens to secure a sufficient quantity of greens for indoor use. Commercial Christmas tree outlets and florist shops frequently offer trimmings and boughs for sale. When purchasing a Christmas tree, select one size larger than you need. The bottom whorl of branches can be removed for use in decorations. Crooked and one-sided trees are often bargain-priced. Lower boughs can be removed, and the top saved for a miniature tree.

Combinations of different kinds of evergreens add interest to holiday decorations. Most of the long-needed (5-6 inch) pines sold for Christmas trees are red pine which is sometimes called Norway pine. Ponderosa pine, with similar length needles, is found in North Dakota shelterbelts. Both of these pines are useful for making centerpieces or door swags. All of the pines resist needle shedding.

Scotch pine has needles 1-2 inches in length. Scotch pine greens are very similar to the Mugo pine which is often used as a foundation plant in the home landscape.

White pine is less available in this region. It has 3-4 inch needles that are softer in texture than the other stiff-needle pines. White pine is often used as an accent green.

Spruce are the most popular evergreens grown as yard trees in this region. Careful pruning of your trees can provide extra-fresh greens for your home. Spruce needles are 1/2-1 inch long.

The arborvitae are generally not used for Christmas trees but are frequently used in the home landscape. The lacy texture of arborvitae can "spice-up" an arrangement.

There are many cultivated varieties of juniper from creeping and spreading types to upright pyramidal shapes. Most have similar scale-like foliage. Juniper is perhaps a less useable green than those discuss-

ed previously. Although it can be used effectively in small amounts as an accent, large quantities may be difficult to blend attractively.

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

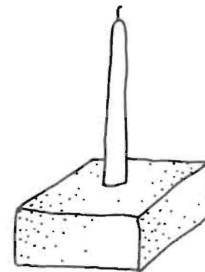
Two-inch thick, green styrofoam is the basis for most types of Christmas centerpieces. Craft-type styrofoam is available at hobby shops and variety stores. Industrial or insulating styrofoam is unsatisfactory because of its texture. Although craft styrofoam is available in both 1- and 2-inch thicknesses, the 1-inch material is too thin for most Christmas decorations. Green styrofoam is preferred over white because fewer greens are needed to conceal the styrofoam, which is a foundation material, not a decorative item.

Styrofoam is easily cut into small useable blocks with a saw or saw-tooth breadknife. A 4- or 5-inch square or rectangular block of styrofoam is large enough for most centerpieces and decorations.

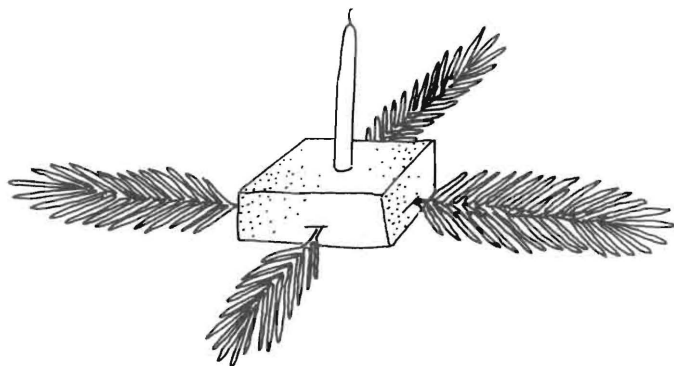
Useful tools for constructing Christmas decorations include pliers, pruning shears and wire cutters. Florist's wire or similar light gauge wire is used to secure the branches of wreaths and door swags.

MAKING A TABLE CENTERPIECE

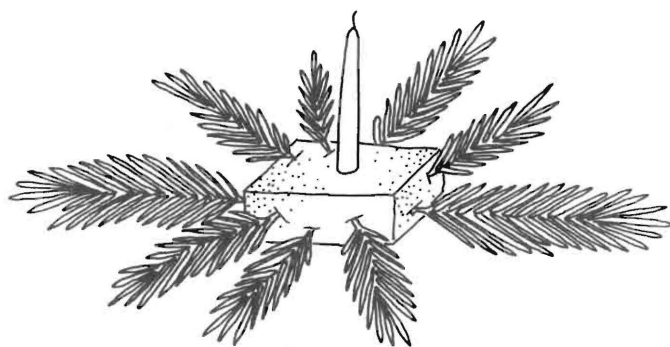
A 4 to 5-inch square or rectangular block of styrofoam 2 inches thick is suitable for most centerpieces. Many centerpieces can be more festive if one or more candles are included. Candles should be inserted into the styrofoam before installing greens. Leave the protective cellophane on the candle to prevent it from becoming soiled during construction. Remove only the bottom inch of cellophane. To insert the candle into the styrofoam, grasp the candle firmly near its base and apply only downward pressure to insure a tight fit and to avoid breaking the candle. Insert candles to a depth of about 1 inch.



1. Insert candle in styrofoam.



2. Insert Primary Branches.



3. Insert Secondary Branches.



4. Continue to fill in.

Decide the desired length and width of the centerpiece. Plan the size according to the location in which the decoration will be used. Lengths of 15-18 inches will fit most dining room or other large tables. Begin by selecting evergreen branch tips 4-8 inches long. Insert the two end pieces near the bottom of the styrofoam block as shown in the illustration. These determine the length. Next insert the shorter side greens, which determine the width. Then add

branches near the bottom all the way around. Stem ends of thick or heavy boughs should be cut at an angle with a knife or pruning shears for ease of insertion and to prevent the bough from turning or rotating.

Continue adding rows of shorter branchlets, progressing upward and inward toward the center. Shorter pieces are added to fill in around the top of the block. A few sprigs may then be placed near the candle, if used, to complete the needed greens and conceal the styrofoam. Avoid over-stuffing. Each branch should have a particular purpose.



DECORATING A CENTERPIECE

Table centerpieces should be decorated on both sides, since they will be viewed from all angles. Festive holiday decorations include cones, Christmas tree ornaments, silk or glass balls, gilded leaves, bows, figurines, silk poinsettias, etc. Dried plant materials such as herb bunches may be added naturally or gilded with gold or silver spray paint.

Decorating a centerpiece involves many of the same principles used in flower arranging. Each centerpiece should have a "focal point," which is the central, eye-catching feature. Rather than "polka-dotting" ornaments throughout the centerpiece, groupings of decorations will give a more pleasing effect. For example, group three silk poinsettias together around the base of the candle. Then tuck a few wired satin balls in between the poinsettias. Largest ornaments should be placed near the lower center of the arrangement to lend visual "weight" to that central point of interest. A few smaller ornaments may be used toward the edges to express the "line" of the arrangement. The "line" is the overall shape or form of the design that is carried throughout the arrangement. Use combinations of three, five or seven when designing arrangements. Odd numbers of decorative items add more interest than even-numbered, symmetrical groupings. For example, instead of pairs of glass balls use groups of three, five, or seven.

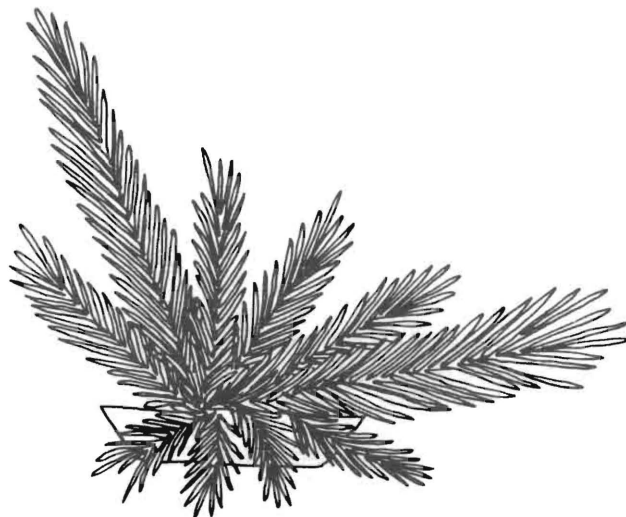
To attach decorations to the arrangement, use wire of medium flexibility that can be bent by hand. The wire must be stiff enough to support the decoration in the desired position. Wire can first be attached to the ornament by wrapping the wire around a stem, hook, or projection on the ornament. Wires

can also be taped or glued to decorations. A hot-glue gun works well if available. Next push the base of the wire into the arrangement's styrofoam and position the decoration as desired.



Decorative Christmas arrangements can be made early in the season. To maintain freshness, store them in a cool location such as the garage between early-season social events before using them for the main holiday season. Greens can become dry and lose their luster if used indoors for several weeks.

CAUTION: If candles are to be burned with natural greens, the greens should be kept low in the arrangement and the candle replaced when it burns down close to the greenery. Single, large diameter candles may be less graceful than tapers but safer because of a slower burning rate. **Never** leave a burning candle unattended in an evergreen centerpiece. Because dry greens are highly flammable, it's best to avoid lighting candles. Instead use candles for decorative purposes only.



Basic Triangle Design



Crescent Design

MANTLE OR BUFFET ARRANGEMENTS

Evergreen arrangements used on the fireplace mantle or buffet are viewed from one side only. Proceed in exactly the same way as with a table centerpiece, except the back side is of less concern. One-sided arrangements may be created in the shape of a triangle, a crescent, or an elongated S-curve (called the Hogarth curve). Naturally-curved pine boughs are easily fit into curved arrangements. Arrangements of this type may be elevated on a suitable vase, compote, overturned goblet, etc., if the lowest row of greens has been inserted in the styrofoam at such an angle that they will hang down slightly and cover the mechanics of the arrangement. These arrangements may be quite "top-heavy" when elevated. Hobby or craft shops sell florist clay that can anchor the styrofoam block to the stand you've chosen.



Hogarth Curve

Triangular arrangements may be made by selecting three branches to form an informal three-sided design. These three primary boughs determine the points of the triangle and the size of the arrangement. Continue working toward the center by filling in with smaller, secondary branches. Remember to maintain the basic triangular lines. When the arrangement is completed, you've made a "nest" in which the decorations will be featured. Follow the decorating principles described previously. Remember to group the decorations near the lower center of the triangle to create a strong "focal point." Smaller decorative materials may be used beyond the central focal area. The grouping of decorations should reflect the shape of the triangle. A few small decorations placed on the back may add sparkle and depth to the completed design.

CHRISTMAS DOOR SWAGS

A swag is an artistic arrangement of one or more evergreen branches. Swags are among the easiest and most effective decorations for a door. Door swags should be large enough to be easily enjoyed from the street. It may be best to attach them directly to the house beside the front entrance rather than on the door itself. When fastened to the door, they may be in the way or damaged by people entering or leaving the home. If used directly on the door, the swag should be fastened at both the top and bottom to prevent flopping. Permanent cup hooks or metal screw eyes may be installed in the siding on the house for use each Christmas.

A standard wire coat hanger makes a shapeable backing for a sturdy outdoor swag. Grasp the bottom of the coat hanger and pull to straighten the wire until wires are about an inch apart. Leave the hook at the top for hanging the swag. Select two fairly large boughs 15-30 inches long of pine or spruce. Wire the upward branch (about 15 inches in length) securely to the coat hanger at a point about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the distance down the hanger. Next, attach a downward-facing branch (about 30 inches) to the wire backing at the point about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the distance down the hanger. After the first two branches have been secured, add a second layer of greens. Shorter pieces of a different type of evergreen may be fastened on top of the pine or spruce. Small branches may be wired in to fill large conspicuous gaps.



Coat Hanger Frame



Add Upright Branches



Add Lower Branches



Decorated Swag

When decorating a swag, the focal point or center of interest is best located near the top or with $\frac{1}{3}$ of the greens above and $\frac{2}{3}$ below the focal point. Decorative ideas include a large red ribbon plus clusters of three to five large cones, several candycanes, or a cluster or two of three small giftwrapped boxes. Outdoor use requires decorations that can withstand wind and moisture, such as plastic ribbon. Decorations may be covered with clear plastic food wrap for added protection.

Swags are useful indoors as well as out. Indoor wall swags can be constructed with styrofoam blocks the same manner as a centerpiece. The styrofoam block can then be pressed against a nail or picture-hanging fixture when fastening the indoor swag to the wall. Try a swag on the brick chimney above a fireplace. More fragile decorative materials can be used with indoor swags.



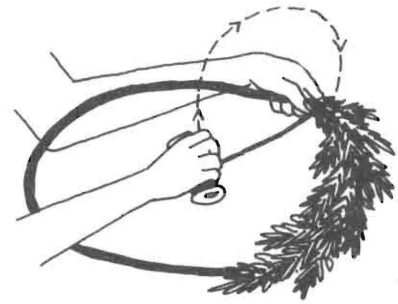
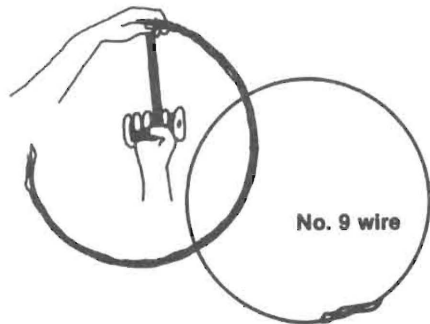
HOLIDAY WREATHS

Ready-made, undecorated wreaths may be purchased at Christmas tree lots, florist shops, or hobby centers. Your own decorations can then be added to the fresh evergreen boughs. Test wreaths for needle freshness and flexibility. Avoid dry, brittle, shedding needles.

If you would rather construct your own wreath, begin with a wire coat hanger that is bent in the form of a circle. If a larger wreath is desired, use number 9 or similar heavy gauge wire to form a circle of the

desired size. Wrap the coat hanger or wire with rubber tape or masking tape to prevent evergreens from slipping when attached. Wire wreath forms and styrofoam wreaths are also available in many craft and hobby stores.

Next wire short sections of evergreen branches to the wire frame in overlapping, shingle fashion until the frame is fully covered. Short branches may be overlapped in one continuous direction around the frame. If you prefer, overlap in one direction down half the frame, then reverse directions down the other half.



Completed wreaths can be decorated simply with one red bow or with a variety of ornaments. Try a cluster of pine cones at the base of the wreath or at the top near the ribbon. Small clusters of artificial fruits or flowers can be scattered around the wreath. Dried oak or maple leaves may be tucked around the ribbon or wired together to form a rosette for the base of the wreath. Attach clusters of colorful cellophane or foil-wrapped candies, plus a child's scissors to allow children to rob the wreath. Christmas balls may be attached singly or in groups. As before, groupings are more effective than "polka-dotting" decorations.



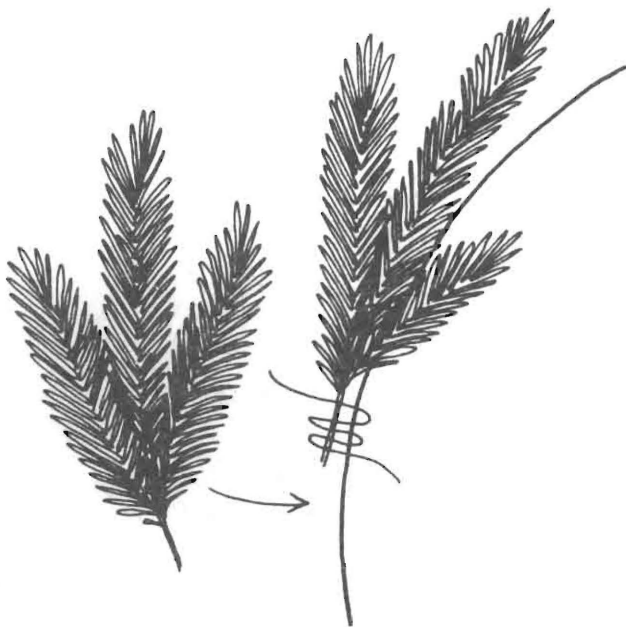
ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR HOLIDAY DECORATING

Lay fresh evergreen boughs across the fireplace mantle. Add a bow, several candles, and bright Christmas balls. Boughs may be replaced as they become dry. Try small evergreen branches around the base of candle holders. Tuck evergreen boughs over wall pictures. If your home has an open staircase, lay an evergreen branch plus a ball or two on each step between banister posts.

Fresh handmade table Christmas trees are a treat if you live in an apartment or small home. These miniature trees are constructed using styrofoam cones available at hobby centers. Small evergreen branches are inserted into the cone in layers, imitating a larger Christmas tree. Enjoy the beauty of a live Christmas tree on a small scale!

Have fun learning to make your own fresh Christmas decorations. Ornaments may be saved for use in future years. The more experienced you become, the better your decorations will look.

Merry Christmas!





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