

HOLIDAY GIFTS FROM NATURE



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Introduction

For years, I shopped for Christmas and Hanukkah gifts in the conventional way — going to crowded malls, waiting in long lines, spending too much money, and emerging with gifts that were “good enough” but seemed to be missing something.

Then it occurred to me to combine my lifelong interest in crafts such as wreath making with my desire to give more unique and personal holiday gifts. Creating gifts from nature is infinitely more pleasurable than shopping in stores, and it saves money. Equally important, making your own gifts saves time. You can work on gift projects at the time of year that suits your own schedule best, organizing your work in stages or doing it all in larger blocks of time.

After reading this booklet, you will be able to create the projects described here as well as use your imagination to improvise on variations. The step-by-step instructions are simple and basic, suitable for both the novice and the experienced crafter. In some cases, packaging ideas are also suggested, but for many of these projects, the gift in itself is already a beautiful presentation.

Wreaths

As one of the oldest holiday traditions, wreaths have become ubiquitous in December. In certain parts of the country, it has even become customary to keep them up until spring as a way to brighten the long winter months. Wreaths make wonderful holiday gifts, not only as seasonal decorations for doors, mantelpieces, or centerpieces, but also — in herbal versions — for year-round decorating anywhere in the home.

Best of all, wreaths are easy and inexpensive to make. When you're ready to present your handmade wreath, simply add a hand-printed tag that lists the ingredients or contains a holiday wish.

QUICKIE SPICE WREATH

adapted from *Herbs for Weddings & Other Celebrations*

These adorable aromatic wreaths can be created in miniature to use as favors or made large to serve as decorations. For a variation, apply the project steps below to a Styrofoam ball, and present it as a topiary decoration. Once all the ingredients below are assembled, you'll be ready to make many spicy wreaths. Why not organize a workshop?

What You Will Need

Styrofoam rings

Brown florist's tape or textured fabric

Hanger

Glue

Assortment of dried materials from herb garden or spice cupboard

1. Use Styrofoam ring of desired size purchased at any craft shop or cut from cardboard, and wrap with brown florist's tape or textured fabric.
2. Attach a small hanger at the back.
3. Cover the wreath generously with glue. Embed bay leaves; small nuts, pinecones, or acorns; bits of cinnamon bark; vanilla beans; whole aniseed, dill, cumin, caraway, poppyseeds — anything dried from your herb garden or spice cupboard. Whole cloves and star anise are both especially fragrant and attractive. For color, glue on cardamom, dried orange peel, petals, rose hips, candied ginger, pistachios, whatever is available. Look around you, especially on the spice shelf in your favorite store, with an eye toward color, size, shape, and texture as well as fragrance.
4. Allow your wreath to dry thoroughly.
5. Fasten on a bow, if you wish.



For an aromatic miniature wreath, attach a variety of dried pods and spices to a small wreath form.

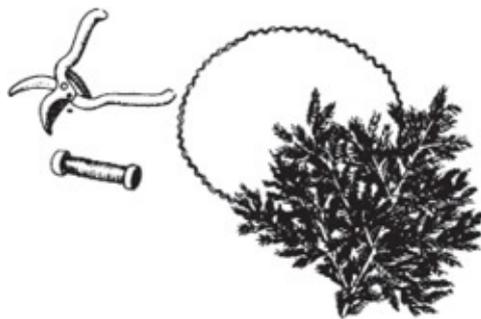
HANDMADE HOLIDAY WREATH

adapted from *Christmas Trees*

Single-faced wreaths, made by wiring the greens on only one side of a wreath ring, are designed for hanging on a wall or door, or to use as a centerpiece. Double-faced wreaths, with greens on both sides of the ring, are preferred by most people because they are more bushy and, since the wreath wire is hidden, they can be hung in windows.

What You Will Need

Tips of seasonal greens such as fir, holly, boxwood, pine or spruce
Hand pruners
Crimped wreath ring of desired size
23-gauge wire



Assembly of Tools

1. Wind a few twists of wire around the wreath ring to fasten it securely.
2. Place a bunch of two to four tips of greens on one side of the ring. Wire the base of the bunch to the ring with two or three tight wraps around. Select some good bushy greens for this first bunch, because it must hide the base of the last bunch you'll insert. If you are making a double-faced wreath, flip the ring over, and use the same method to wrap a similar bunch onto the back side. Place it almost, but not quite, opposite the first one.
3. Lay another bunch of greens over the base of the first bunch, hiding the

wire, and wire this one to the ring. Continue in this fashion all the way around the ring. If it is a double-faced wreath, continue wiring on both sides, gently turning the ring over after each bunch is secured.

4. When you reach the spot where you began, tuck the base of the last bunch underneath the tops of the first that you wired. Wire it in carefully, so neither the stems nor the wire show.



Securing greens to the ring

5. Cut or break the wire and fasten it tightly with several twists to one of the wires or to the ring itself.

Wreath-Making Tip

Since the upper and lower sides of greens such as fir, holly, and boxwood look quite different, they must be “faced” when placing them on the ring so the pale side won’t show. Pines look the same on both sides, so this facing is not necessary.

Herbal Creations

The eloquence of herbs is never more apparent than at holiday time. They speak of many things — of ancient wisdom and future joy. Gifts made from herbs are not only a pleasure to give, they are equally delightful to make! You can use fresh, dried, or pressed herbs in any quantity available to you. Pick and choose from the projects below gifts that suit each person’s lifestyle best, and build upon the suggestions with your own improvisations.

HERB BOUQUET

adapted from *Herbs for Weddings & Other Celebrations*

Basic flower arranging is a breeze if you follow the principles outlined below. Vertical, horizontal, or triangular designs are traditional and easiest to accomplish, and they usually work well for herbal arrangements, whether large or small. Choose a beautiful vase and plan your arrangement with its size in mind, deciding in advance how tall and how wide the arrangement should be.

What You Will Need

Vase in desired shape, color and size

Herbs, foliage, and flowers of varying lengths, the longest being twice the height of the vase

1. Position the tallest and longest side stems of your herbs, foliage, or flowers first. Use a ruler if you need to. This is the skeleton of your arrangement; never extend outside this framework.
2. Fill in these outermost perimeters with slightly shorter materials, both herbs and foliage, fleshing out your pattern.
3. Tuck more herbs and greens in between. I call this the “poke and shove” method of flower arranging. Don’t be timid. Although your bouquet may look sparse and funny at first, poke and shove to your heart’s content. Be assured it will work.
4. Fill in from behind as well as in front, angling materials as necessary to conform to your original basic pattern. Stems of varying lengths will give the proper fullness, depth, and dimension. The arrangement should not have the uniform appearance of a clipped hedge.
5. Finally, place your flowers strategically here and there, angling them so that all their faces are visible from all perspectives. If you have enough flowers, tuck a few in the back to complete your arrangement properly.
6. Add decorative elements such as baby’s breath or bows last, if desired.
7. Mist thoroughly, swathe in sheets of plastic, and keep shaded and cool until time to present your beautiful fragrant bouquet.



Create oversize bouquets in large vases.

POTPOURRI PARASOL

adapted from *Herbs for Weddings & Other Celebrations*

This unique fragrance packet makes a welcome gift for anyone who likes pretty things. It is surprisingly easy and inexpensive to create. Why not make several?

What You Will Need

2 pieces of calico fabric (in holiday colors if desired), 10" × 10"

One 8-inch and one 22-inch length of ½-inch lace and coordinating thread

One 12-inch pipe cleaner

¼ cup fragrant potpourri

One narrow satin ribbon (12 inches long)

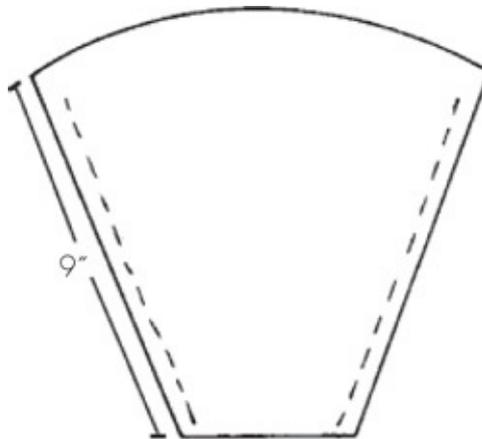
1. Enlarge the parasol pattern shown on page 9, and use it to cut two pieces from the calico. The long sides of each piece should measure approximately 9 inches.
2. With the wrong sides of the calico together, stitch the sides together, taking ¼-inch seams. Turn right side out, and press with a warm iron.
3. Hand sew or machine stitch the 22-inch length of lace around the top edge of the parasol pouch so that the lace ruffles rise upward. Hand stitch the 8-inch length of lace around the bottom edge, lace ruffles downward. Be careful not to stitch across the bottom opening of the pouch.
4. Insert the pipe cleaner down the middle of the parasol. Position it so that

approximately 2 to 3 inches show at the bottom. Stitch in place across the bottom.



Potpourri-filled parasols make thoughtful holiday gifts.

5. Gather the bottom of the parasol with basting stitches and pull it closed. Secure the pouch with tiny stitches.
6. Stuff the parasol with your favorite potpourri (see below for the recipes).
7. Baste around the top and gather to close. Hand stitch the top closure carefully, securing with tiny stitches. Tie the narrow satin ribbon in place just below the lace edge, and make a bow.
8. Bend the upper portion of the pipe cleaner to form the handle.



parasol pattern

Recipes for Potpourri

Rose Jar Potpourri

Rose petals, dried

¼ cup Kosher salt

¼ ounce each ground cloves, mace, and allspice

½ ounce ground cinnamon

¼ pound lavender flowers
¼ ounce toilet water or cologne (preferably lavender)
A few drops of rose oil
2 ounces of orrisroot
1 quart dried herbs and flowers
½ cup patchouli
¼ cup sandalwood chips
¼ cup vetiver roots
1 teaspoon each frankincense, myrrh, ground cloves, and ground cinnamon
1 tonka bean, finely chopped
¼ cup ground allspice
10 drops rose oil
1 cup ground orrisroot
Mixed Bag Potpourri

Carefully and gently mix together the ingredients of your potpourri. Store in a tightly closed container for 3–4 weeks until well blended.

SOFT SCULPTURE

adapted from *Herbs for Weddings & Other Celebrations*

This fabric-enshrouded pot of herbs makes an entertaining gift or centerpiece. Once you see how beautiful your creation is, you'll want to make many of them.

What You Will Need

Pot of herbs
Plastic or foil
Batting or tissue paper
Square of calico or holiday fabric large enough to cover pot
Ribbon or yarn long enough to tie around pot rim

1. Cover the pots with plastic or foil, so they may be watered easily and kept alive.
2. Wrap each pot with batting or tissue to give it some puffiness. Set the pot on the square of fabric. (See illustration A.)
3. Gather the fabric up around the rim and tie it with contrasting ribbons or wool yarn. (See illustration B.)

A



Place pot, foil, and batting on colorful fabric.

B



Bundle fabric around rim of pot and tie off with a ribbon.

Nature Prints

Simple nature prints make beautiful gifts that can be worn, framed, or displayed. This centuries-old process of recreating images from the natural world requires only a natural object, pigment, and a printable surface such as paper or fabric. It is a low-cost process that yields unlimited possibilities, restricted only by your imagination and the natural objects available to you. Described below are two of my favorite nature printing projects for holiday giving.

LEAF-STAMPED STATIONERY

adapted from *Nature Printing with Herbs, Fruits, & Flowers*

Leaf stamping is an easy way to create beautiful gift packets of stationery for letters, memos, postcards, and envelopes. The design possibilities are endless for place cards, note cards, holiday cards, labels, and gift wrap as well. Almost anyone will appreciate a gift of hand-printed stationery, whether they use it for handwritten letters or computer-printed and faxed messages.



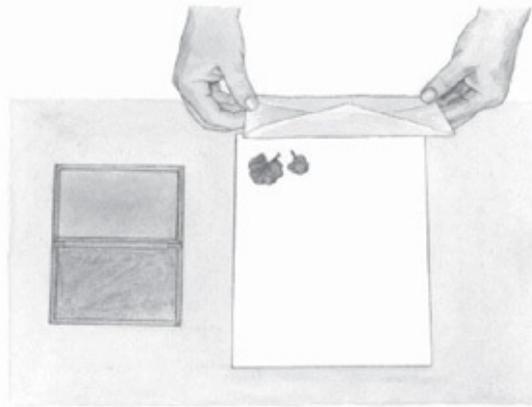
Leaf stamps can be used to ornament stationery, cards, envelopes, labels and invitations.

What You Will Need

Stamp pads (colors of your choice)
Tweezers
Variety of small leaves
Typing paper, copier paper, or stationery of your choice
Envelopes to fit selected paper

1. Using a stamp pad and tweezers, ink several small leaves on both sides. Turn over each leaf once or twice while pressing it on the stamp pad to ensure enough ink has adhered. (*Note: Stamp pad embossing inks and powders create glossy, raised designs that look very professional. However, some printers and fax machines may not accept paper with glossy, raised designs.*)

2. Arrange the inked leaves on a piece of stationery as you would like them to print.
3. Position an envelope face down over the leaves on the stationery as you would like it to be printed, and press with the heel of your hand. Inking the stationery and the envelope at the same time will allow you to design a matched set.
4. Remove envelope and leaf carefully and allow printed paper to dry before packaging as a gift.



Variation: To create two prints at once, simply place a second sheet of stationery facedown over leaves in Step 2.

HAMMERED PRINT T-SHIRT

adapted from *Nature Printing with Herbs, Fruits, & Flowers*

This printing technique requires no paint or ink. Naturally occurring pigments, such as green chlorophyll, are released when a young, juicy leaf is pummeled on natural fiber fabric. The resulting pigmented design is then set in a mineral bath.



Hammered-leaf and fabric-paint nature prints can be combined on a T-shirt.

What You Will Need

Fresh, young leaves

Natural fiber T-shirt or fabric, prewashed and ironed

Hammer with a flat end

Newspapers

Waxed paper

Transparent tape

Salt or washing soda

Wood ashes (optional)

Water

Iron

1. Lay a section of newspaper topped with a sheet of waxed paper on a hard, flat surface.
2. Spread the T-shirt or fabric on the surface so that the area to be printed on is smoothed with no wrinkles and then arrange the leaves you intend to print. Secure all edges of each leaf to the fabric with tape (see Figure 1). Cover leaves with another sheet of waxed paper.

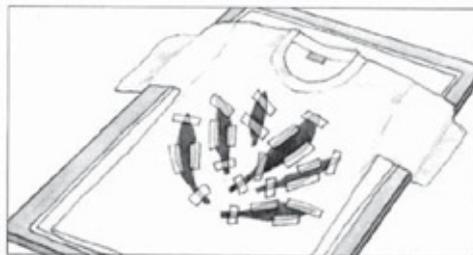


Figure 1

3. Hammer leaves for several minutes until prints appear (see Figure 2). Replace the waxed paper cover as needed, if it rips. Some leaves may print better than others, and coloration will vary. Very fragile leaves disintegrate quickly. You may want to experiment first on a piece of scrap fabric, and then select the leaves that work best.

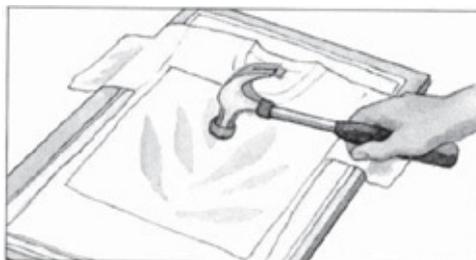


Figure 2

4. To set colorfastness, soak the T-shirt or fabric in a solution of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup salt to 2 gallons tepid water for ten minutes, or in a solution of 2 tablespoons washing soda dissolved in 2 gallons tepid water for ten minutes. Rinse thoroughly and dry outdoors or in a dryer. Iron fabric smooth.
5. Then gift wrap your finished project in some of your favorite hand-printed

or store-purchased paper. Or simply roll up the T-shirt or fabric neatly and tie it with a beautiful satin ribbon.

Variation: For a reddish-brown color, follow directions in step 4 for a mineral bath and rinse, then immediately soak in 3 gallons of cold water mixed with 1 cup of wood ashes for five minutes. Rinse again, dry, and iron.

Gifts for the Bath

Bath salts, oils, and herbal baths are easy to make and always warmly welcomed, perfect for a friend or loved one who has a stressful lifestyle and enjoys unwinding with a long, luxurious bath. Bathing has of course been an important daily ritual for thousands of years, pampering the body and the spirit. Cleopatra was known for her soothing milk baths and Marie Antoinette for her long, luxurious herbal ones. Gifts for the bath carry on this timeless tradition in a time-bound world.

Whether you are purchasing or packaging essential oils, you should ensure that they are kept in full, dark, glass bottles. Plastic bottles are porous and will allow the essential oil to dissipate. Dark-colored glass, such as blue, green, or brown, is necessary to protect essential oils from light, which will diminish their potency. Essential oils should also be kept in full bottles, as contact with air will accelerate their deterioration. If you are packaging your own oils, whether for yourself or as a gift, you can often find decorative, dark glass bottles in antique stores, at flea markets, or at bath and gift shops. Make sure the lids fit tightly.

Bath Oils

adapted from *The Essential Oils Book*

Bath oils are a great treat for a spouse or special friend — especially at holiday time. An age-old treatment for dry skin, scented oils can also be mentally relaxing, stimulating, and sensual.

Adding Essential Oils to Your Bath

Essential oils should be added to the bath just before you enter the tub. If added to the water while the tub is filling, much of the oils' precious essences goes up in steam and very little is left to be absorbed by the skin. Once you've added the oils, be sure to mix them into the water well. It is very important to avoid direct skin contact with undiluted essential oils that may irritate or cause skin sensitivity. You can also dilute the essential oils in a carrier oil before adding them to the bath, or, as some people prefer, in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk or cream.

WAKE UP BATH I

This is a refreshing blend that leaves you feeling awake and energized.

3 drops rosemary

3 drops lemon

2 drops eucalyptus

For bath: Oils should be added directly to a tub full of warm water and mixed well.

For shampoo or shower soap: Add blend to 1 ounce unscented shampoo or liquid castile soap.

For massage or hair oil: Add blend to 1 ounce base oil.

WAKE UP BATH II

Here is a slight variation of the above recipe.

3 drops rosemary

2 drops peppermint

3 drops lemon

Follow the same directions as for *Wake Up Bath I*.

RELAXING BATH

This blend smells wonderful and will help you to unwind after a long day.

5 drops lavender

2 drops ylang-ylang

2 drops rose absolute or otto (also called attar)

For bath: Oils should be added directly to a tub full of warm bath water and mixed well.

For massage: Add to ½ ounce base oil and 2 drops Roman chamomile (optional) and massage over the body before rest.

COLD CARE BATH

This pungent blend opens the nose, soothes aching muscles, and relieves congestion.

6 drops eucalyptus

3 drops frankincense

3 drops hyssop

2 drops ylang-ylang, rose geranium, or jasmine absolute (optional)

For bath: Add oils directly to a tub full of warm water and mix well.

As inhalant: Add blend to a simmer pot in a sick room. Be sure to watch the water level.

For massage oil: Add blend to ½ ounce base oil and massage into chest, arms, neck, and abdomen. (Before using, test for skin sensitivity first by applying to a small patch of skin on the inside of your arm.)

For treatment on the go: If you must go to work while suffering from a cold, try blending these oils and adding them to tissues.

Store them in a bag you can carry all day and inhale as often as possible.

ANTIDEPRESSANT BATH

This is a relaxing, soothing blend that relieves heaviness in heart and mind.

3 drops bergamot

3 drops rosewood

3 drops lavender

2 drops rose otto

For bath: Add oils directly to a tub full of warm water and mix well.

For massage: Add essential oils to ½ ounce base oil and massage over the entire body, especially the heart area. For a full-body massage, double the amounts in recipe.

Bath-Oil Gift Bottles

Make up bath-oil blends in larger quantities to divide up and package as gifts in dark glass bottles. You can use either pure, un-diluted essential oils or a blend of oils diluted in a base oil to use as a skin softener. For undiluted bath blends, you'll need bottles that hold ½ to 1 ounce; for diluted floating bath blends, purchase 2- to 4-ounce sizes.

Make the gift complete by creating a nice label that clearly states the ingredients, cautions, and directions for adding oils to the bath, and number of drops to use (or capfuls in the case of diluted blends). I always include the date the blend was made and my initials as well. If you are making a large quantity of bath blend for several gifts, you can order decorative address labels by mail with your blend information printed in place of your name and address.

I like to make labels from either ready-made sticky-backs or paper cards that can be hung from the bottle neck. If you use sticky-back labels, cover them with a protective layer of clear tape once they're on the bottle so they last longer. Paper cards can be hole punched and tied on the bottle with a piece of ribbon. Tie on a glass eyedropper with each bottle, unless you can find bottles with dropper inserts. Eyedroppers come in sizes to fit specific bottles. I use ones that fit 4 ml (1 dram) and 15 ml (approximately ½ ounce) amber bottles.

OTHER BATH-OIL COMBINATIONS

Here are some other possible combinations of essential oils that make good bath blends. You can mix and match the amounts of each ingredient depending on your personal preference.

■ **lavender, ylang-ylang, patchouli, and rose absolute**

- lemon, juniper, grapefruit, and rosemary
- bergamot, rosewood, sandalwood, frankincense, and clary sage
- lavender, rose geranium, and patchouli
- sweet orange, vanilla oleoresin, and frankincense

BATH SALTS

adapted from *The Essential Oils Book*

Bath salts make great stocking-stuffers or Hannukah gifts. There are endless combinations of essential oils for bath salts. These are a few favorites that work well. The recipes can be easily doubled to make more.

Make sure the salt is well dissolved in the bath water or you will end up sitting on uncomfortable little lumps. Remember to keep the container of bath salts tightly sealed to prevent the volatile essential oils and absolutes from escaping into the environment and reducing the potency and effects of the bath salts.

BATH SALTS COMBINATION #1

This is a balancing, refreshing blend. If desired, add 1 or 2 drops of a citrus oil like lemon, sweet orange, or tangerine to brighten this blend.

3 drops rosewood

3 drops bergamot

2 drops frankincense

2 cups (500 ml) sea salt

Bath-Salts Gift Jars

When properly sealed, bath salts can last a long time. To ensure a longer shelf life, do not add base oil to the salt (you can include instructions for doing this just before use on the label). Find a pretty jar or decorative tin, and give this gift to a friend who's experiencing exasperating times. (You might want to put a small muslin bag of rice in the bottom of the container of salt to absorb any moisture that might find its way into the container.)

Wrap the container in some pretty paper you've purchased or printed and gather at the top with ribbon or twine. Attach a hand-printed card detailing instructions for use.

BATH SALTS COMBINATION #2

These essential oils are known to help cleanse toxins from the body, and the scent is clean and fresh. Drinking a lot of water is also very important when