

Horticultural Holiday Decorations

Happy Holidays! It is at this time of the year when we get out all of our holiday decorations. Have you ever stopped and thought that there are a lot of plants and plant parts in our holiday decorations? The main decoration for Christmas is a tree, we use holly plants for their berries and green leaves, we also use greenery from conifers as wreaths, swags and garland. These decorations not only look nice for the season but they tend to bring a nice holiday scent inside our homes. I thought I would take the time to go over why we use these great horticultural decorations during the holidays each year.

The biggest decoration in size and in use is the Christmas tree. Why do we use a tree to celebrate the holidays? According to Alabama Cooperative Extension, Christmas trees are believed to symbolize immortality. The Germanic people used evergreen boughs in their homes during winter for protection of their home and to return life to the snow-covered forest. There have been many different civilizations throughout history that have used evergreens in their homes, decorated or not, to celebrate the holidays, according to the University of Illinois Extension. The ancient Romans used decorated trees during their winter festival to honor their god of agriculture. Trees were sold in Germany in the 1500's to be put in homes, undecorated. They came to the United States in 1747, when people in Pennsylvania decorated wooded pyramids with evergreen branches and candles. By 1850, decorated Christmas trees were a widely used tradition in America. The first retail tree market was in New York in 1851 and the first President of the United States to put up a Christmas tree in the White House was Franklin Pierce in 1856. The first national Christmas tree was put up in 1923 on the lawn of the White House by President Calvin Coolidge.

Many people use artificial trees at Christmas because they are easier to get and care for, you don't have to cut them down or water them while in your home. They can also be used for many years instead of just one. If you do use a real tree, there are typically six species that we utilize for our holiday decorations including Scotch pine, Douglas fir, noble fir, white pine, balsam fir, and white spruce. Scotch pines are utilized in 40 percent of the market, and Douglas firs make up 35 percent of the market.

Hollies are also a plant used to decorate our homes for the holidays. According to Alabama Cooperative Extension, holly was also used to honor the god of agriculture by the ancient Romans. It continued to be used by Christians on their decks of their homes in Rome to avoid detection and persecution by Romans.

Mistletoe is another great holiday tradition. This is the small leafy plant that we hang from a doorway or just somewhere up high where people will walk under it. The tradition is that if two people meet underneath the mistletoe they are supposed to kiss. This tradition began in ancient times as a ritual people did to increase their chance of marriage in the upcoming year.

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As you can see, there are many different plants that we use in all of our holiday decorations around our homes. These decorations remind us of the great holiday, however we celebrate. They all have many different starts and traditions to why we use them.

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