

Online Discount Mart offers tips to complete your holiday decorating

Online Discount Mart, an online retailer in Tampa, FL, offers tips on how to make your holiday decorations more unique and vibrant than ever before.

For a lovely and unique table-top centerpiece with a distinct country flair, cover 3 small square boxes of varying sizes with a sheet of Spanish moss; tie with wide gauzy striped ribbon and top with a bow; in the top of the bow tuck in a sprig of mistletoe or eucalyptus for the finishing touch. Group together

To decorate a corner of the room or a corner of an (outside) covered porch, use larger boxes and bows. Tuck large springs of mistletoe, chrysanthemum flowers, or groups of small plastic fruits or nuts in the center of the bows.

Weave pre-decorated garlands of artificial evergreen around the banister; add large colorful bows on the banisters. Spray with evergreen air freshener, following any cautions listed on label.

Make your own festive "bowls" to hold potpourri using dried fruit. For each bowl, cut off the top 1/3rd of an orange, tangerine, or lime. Scrape out all of the fruit and as much flesh as you can from each section. Rinse each section with cool water; let dry completely by air drying in a warm, sunny place, or by baking them on the rack of a 125-degree oven for 8 to 12 hours; turn occasionally.

Once dry, fill the bowl half with potpourri, and replace tops. Tie shut with raffia or gauzy ribbon. Accent bows with a dried thinly sliced lemon or lime round, cinnamon sticks, star anise, or bay leaves. These also make wonderful hostess gifts!

Cover a fire mantel with a garland made from large, generous sprigs of baby's breath and small sprigs of mistletoe. Make garland long enough to cascade over ends of mantel about one foot (a 7-foot garland takes about 5 large bundles of baby's breath); place large, wide bows with streamers made from burgundy wire ribbon (gauzy ribbon with wire attached along sides, to retain shape) to garland, about 1 foot from each end of the mantel. Twist ends of streamers in a loose spiral curl.

When entertaining, make lovely place cards for place settings using small Seckel pears, or another small pear variety. Leaving the stems intact, rub each pear with copper Rub 'n Buff paint. With a fine ballpoint pen, write the guest's name on copper "T" garden labels (size 2" X 3.125") available through Orion Garden Markers, Cloverdale, CA. Insert the pointed ends of the labels into tops of the painted pears at an angle.

When entertaining at meal time, keep foods warmer longer by heating the dinner plates, bowls, and platters to be used in the dishwasher before filling with warm foods. (Be sure and warn guests that the plates have been heated.)

Make a festive porch decoration to place near door and greet guests using galvanized buckets. Fill each with long-stemmed candy canes, or bright colored tapered candles. Pour ice rock salt in the buckets to simulate mounds of snow, and to hold candy canes and candles in place. Or fill the buckets with large pine cones or sprigs of evergreen with a dusting of fake snow spray or glitter. Tie

a large ribbon around the bucket.

Cover your doorbell with oversized sleigh bells attached to a large bow. Guests can jingle the bells instead of ringing the door bell upon arrival.

A pillar candle placed in a glass hurricane globe and anchored by handfuls of nuts in the shell, with a gay green, red, and gold ribbon attached at the base makes a lovely centerpiece.

Instead of making a fire in the fireplace, fill the fireplace with various heights of pillar and votive candles of the same color (ivory looks nice). Place some candles on bricks, some in clear glass candleholders, or plates. Arrange evergreen sprigs and boughs around the candles. Dim lights in the room and light candles just before guests are due to arrive; be sure to open the fireplace flue.

Dress up wooden dining room chairs using long lengths of sheer fabric around the back of the chair. Secure by cinching it in place with a ribbon about 8 inches to a foot from the top of the back of the chair; leave a graceful tail of fabric under the bow. Use wide, gauzy wire ribbon to make your bow, add fake clusters of berries in the center.

For a quick festive way to arrange napkins, roll the napkin up using the long end. Tie a satin ribbon in the middle; attach a large piece of cellophane wrapped candy to the ribbon. Gently tug at ends of napkin to widen.

A plain terra cotta pot for plants can quickly be turned into an eye appealing holiday ornament by sponging the outside and upper lip of the pot with metallic gold paint. Once dried, stuff tissue in the bottom of the pot; fill with an assortment of round Christmas tree ornaments. Sprigs of evergreen or baby's breath and mistletoe with a large bow placed around the base of the pot adds the finishing touch.

Make a customized tree skirt with eye-catching appeal using a round 54" table cloth in the design and pattern of your choice. Cut a small circle in the middle (for the base of the tree). Cut a slit from outer edge to the opening. Arrange the skirt around the base of the tree; turn raw edges of slit under and "hem" using a glue gun. Using the glue gun, attach cording or fringe trim to the outer skirt, or add a row of bows.

A wicker basket or copper canister filled with large pine cones to be used as fire starters is more festive and fun when pine cones are drizzled with holiday scented candle wax (either cinnamon or bayberry would be perfect!). A large Christmas bow on the basket handle tops it off!

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