



Rural Action

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Pomeroy Woollen Woods Event – Crafters Newsletter 6 – Christmas Plants

Thank you for your interest and participation in producing artwork for the Woollen Woods event, which has been postponed until Spring 2021 (subject to Covid -19 restrictions), we will continue however to encourage crafters to produce items so we have an even better display next year.

Our theme of Bees, Butterflies and Blooms, will be used to create items for the Woollen Woods event. In this newsletter we focus on the Christmas season and the plants associated with it.

In the dim and distant past before the ancient Romans, pagan priests in Europe, used evergreen plants in strange and mysterious ceremonies to ward off evil spirits and because they remained green all year round the winter evergreens became associated with long life. So these plants were used to ensure a long life and to welcome the approaching spring.



Holly – Holly is not typically sold as a live plant at Christmas, but the bright red berries



of female holly bushes against its dark green pointed leaves are a popular decoration at Christmas. Surprisingly, while holly is a traditional Christmas plant, its origins date back to the Druids, who thought the plant represented everlasting life.

Christians adopted the plant as a symbol of Jesus' promise of everlasting life. The thorny leaves of the holly symbolise the crown of thorns Jesus wore at his crucifixion and the red berries the bloodshed.

Ivy -. The fact that ivy, like holly, stayed green throughout the year led some to believe it had magical properties and led to its use as home decoration in the winter months. It too, symbolized eternal life, re-birth and the spring season. In some cultures, ivy was a symbol of marriage and friendship, perhaps due to its tendency to cling. In ancient Rome, ivy



was associated with Bacchus (known as Dionysus in Greek mythology), god of wine and revelry. Accordingly, it was sometimes used as trimming in ancient festivals. Over time, many customs from pagan (non-Christian) celebrations were incorporated by Christians into religious holidays. For a period, ivy was banished by Christians due to its ability to grow in shade, which led to its association with secrecy and debauchery. Nevertheless, the custom of decorating with holly and ivy during Christian holidays was eventually accepted.

Mistletoe – Another Christmas plant used as decoration more than a live plant, this common Christmas decoration also dates to the Druids. As it bears white berries in mid-December the mistletoe was significant for druids because of this it was associated with immortality and used to cure animal infertility. The berries themselves are poisonous to humans. Mistletoe is hung indoors to protect the house from disaster and a sign of



fertility. The tradition of kissing under the mistletoe goes back to antiquity but was embraced by the prudish Victorians who stole kisses under the plant. For each kiss, a berry was removed and when denuded of berries the kissing had to stop.

Poinsettia – Perhaps the most recognizable flower for Christmas is the poinsettia. Originally sold with bright red and green leaves (the “flowers” are actually leaves on the plant), poinsettias today are sold in a wide variety of colours and patterns. The vibrant plants are native to Guatemala and Mexico. Poinsettias were cultivated by the Mayans and Aztecs, who valued the red bracts as a colourful, reddish-purple fabric dye, and the sap for its many medicinal qualities. Decorating homes with poinsettias was initially a Pagan tradition, enjoyed during annual mid-winter celebrations. Initially, the tradition was frowned upon, but was officially approved by the early church around 600 AD. The poinsettia was first associated with Christmas in southern Mexico in the 1600s, when Franciscan priests used the colourful leaves and bracts to adorn extravagant nativity scenes.



Amaryllis – Amaryllis is another popular Christmas plant. Tall and graceful, this holiday



flower bulb can make a statement as a centre piece on the table and its trumpet like huge flowers look like they are harking the Christmas holidays. Typically, the red varieties of amaryllis are sold for the holidays, but they come in colours ranging from red to white to pink to orange and petals that are solid, striped, or

speckled in all colours.

Christmas Cactus – The Christmas cactus is so named because it is thought to naturally bloom at Christmas time. If you own this holiday plant for many years, you will find it prefers to bloom closer to early December. Regardless, these lovely cacti have lush flowers that hang down like lovely Christmas ornaments from the ends of the leaves of the plant.



Rosemary – While the rosemary plant is a lesser-known Christmas plant, it is making a comeback. A few centuries ago, rosemary was a part of the Nativity story in that Baby Jesus’ clothes were dried on a rosemary bush. Christians then believed that smelling rosemary at Christmas brought good luck. Today, rosemary is sold as a Christmas plant pruned in the form of a Christmas tree.



Christmas Tree (Firs Pines & Spruces) – No list of Christmas plants would be complete without mentioning the centrepiece of any Christmas celebrating house. The Christmas tree can be either a live potted tree or a cut tree, although different tree species survive better in warm central heated homes as illustrated by the following table.

Selection Guide to the Most Common Christmas Tree Varieties in the UK								
Ratings: 5= best, 4= very good, 3= average, 2= fair, 1= worst								
	Firs			Pine		Spruces		
	Nordmann	Noble	Fraser	Lodgepole	White	White	Norway	Blue
Needle Holding (without water)	5	5	5	5	5	3	1	4
Needle Holding (with water)	5	5	5	5	5	4	2	5
Firmness Branches	2	3	3	5	2	4	3	5
Fragrance	5	5	4	3	4	1	3	3
Needle softness	5	5	5	2	5	3	3	3
Cost	2	3	3	5	4	3	2	1

Nowadays the tree is just as likely to be an artificial one as real. Legend has it that Martin Luther the Christian Reformation leader was struck by the beauty of a snow-covered grove of fir trees as they twinkled and sparkled in the moonlight that he placed a tree in his house and attached candles to mimic the effects of nature and to glorify God. It was

not until the middle of the 19th century that the practice spread to here. Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert was German and it was he who brought the first Christmas tree to Britain when he had one placed in Windsor Castle. From there the fashion spread rapidly to middle-class homes. Today's Christmas trees are lit with 'fairy lights', glass baubles, and garlands of shiny tinsel. Many new houses do not have fireplaces and chimneys, and this is certainly so in the tropics, so the tradition of hanging stockings over the mantelpiece in the expectation of it being packed with gifts is disappearing. Gifts are arranged under the Christmas tree. Tree decorations were first produced in Germany in the 17th century.

So the next time you are passing by the beautifully erected Christmas Tree in Pomeroy's Diamond, think about the past generations and the local traditions associated with Christmas and with the area. Despite things having moved on, we all still love to see the local flora and fauna decorating our homes at this time of year.

Continuing with the Christmas theme I have included some further knitting and crocheting patterns associated with the Festive Season, to give you a break from Bees, Butterflies and Blooms and I hope you enjoy working on these.

On another note we are currently rolling out the Window Wanderland project in Pomeroy and we would encourage you all to get involved and come and see the wonderful displays that should be appearing shortly in windows over the coming weeks. For further details see our new facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/pomeroypeopleplace/>

Finally, thanks to Pomeroy Resource Centre (Phyllis) and The Rowan Tree Centre (Caroline) they will continue to be the collection points for items that you have completed, so we can store them until next year. Please continue to send me your photos of the wonderful items that you all have been crafting so I can feature them in our crafters Newsletter. Also, please feel free to contact me if you require any additional materials – wool, felt etc. or indeed require any further help or support.

From all at Rural Action we wish you and your family health, happiness, peace and prosperity this Christmas and in the coming Year.

Kind Regards

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