



Using Your Garden as Inspiration for Fall and Holiday Decorating

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This time of year in the Lake Tahoe region, many gardeners are busy putting their gardens to rest for the winter. As you prune and clean up, look around your garden for items you might be able to recycle into holiday cheer.

Being relatively new to the Lake Tahoe area, I try to be aware of the many new plants I have been introduced to in the last six years. I also like to keep using my containers, even throughout the winter. My colorful annuals will die off, but my pots can still look festive if I think about evergreen and dried materials. Here is a container I designed when my hostas went to sleep in the pot. Using a few fir branches, some sugar pine cones, and some red twig dogwood stems, I created a winter display on the front porch.

Look around your yard for different pine cones, fir cones, or dried berries. Aspen branches and birch branches are nice for vertical interest if you can cut a few and strip off the leaves and twigs. If you wander over to the Carson Valley or down in the California foothills, oak leaves, magnolia

leaves, and willow branches (you can find red and yellow willow branches along the roadsides) also make good material for dried arrangements. As you forage, be sure to get any needed permission to take any cuttings or gatherings.

When designing your creation, think about height. Normally your tallest material will be no higher than the height of the container. Odd numbers look best in arrangements, so use three or five of any object. Group the showiest objects you are using together for a bigger impact. Think of making about three tiers, one at the base of your container, one of medium height, and something tall in back. You can see this concept in the photo above. The fir branches provide a base, the berries and pine cones the middle layer, and the dogwood twigs provide the height.

In the basin photo below, the layers are front, middle and back, with not a lot of height. That is because this container is wide and deep and not tall. The arrangement echoes the container by spreading horizontally. The kale plants provide a focal point in front, the pine cones and Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) branches add interest across the center, and the dogwood branches bring it together, although a bit on the wild side, at the rear of the basin.