

### By Melinda Myers

#### *Gardening Expert*

The holidays can be a wonderful, yet stressful time. Reduce stress and enhance your families' enjoyment this season by increasing the benefits of holiday décor and gifts and by taking a few shortcuts to properly care for holiday trees and plants.

1. Keep your Christmas tree looking its best by keeping the tree stand filled with water. Make this a daily chore for someone trying to stay on Santa's nice list.

Don't worry if good help is hard to find. Purchase or make your own self-watering device. Use a decorative tin or plastic bucket set in a box and wrapped to hide its presence. Fill it with water and run a piece of plastic tubing from the bucket to the tree stand. Weight each end of the tubing, so it stays at the bottom of the reservoir. Test before leaving town to make sure it is in working order.

2. Add some holiday plants this year. Many studies have shown that indoor plants can boost mood levels, reduce fatigue and even lower stress.

Plus, it's easy to extend the life of your holiday plants. Place them in a cool bright location away from drafts of hot or cold air. Water thoroughly and often enough to keep the soil moist. Pour off any excess water that collects in the saucer, basket or foil wrap to prevent root rot.

Save time and improve your plants growing conditions by placing pebbles in the base of the saucer or foil to elevate the plants above the excess water. As the water evaporates, it increases the humidity around the plants. Or purchase one of the saucer inserts, like rubber grids, that work the same way.

3. Use nature-inspired decorations that provide enjoyment throughout the holiday season and beyond. Colorful stems, white painted allium seed heads and wooden stars can add beauty throughout the holidays and much of the year. Red wood wreaths are festive enough for the holidays and timeless enough to leave hanging on your wall year round.

Luminaries can be used to light the entrance to your home or the path to your outdoor living space during warmer months. Use a few roosting pocket bird houses to decorate trees and greenery and then move them outside for the birds.

These decorations can provide beauty and enjoyment way beyond the holiday season and remove some of the pressure to take down all of the holiday decorations by a certain date.

4. Spruce up indoor plants with a few holiday flowers, spangles and lights. Place a few cut flowers in floral picks filled with water. Place these in one or more of your houseplants for some seasonal color. Or add one of the miniature poinsettias, kalanchoes or cyclamen to a large planter. Simply sink the flowering plant, pot and all, into your houseplant container. Replace the small flowering plants as they fade or the seasons change.

Add colorful stems, ribbons and winter branch lights to your houseplants and planters for a bit of seasonal sparkle. Branch lights are also a festive way to light an entrance, bathroom, or other out of the way space. Look for lights with timers to extend the life of the batteries and reduce your workload.

5. Increase value and extend enjoyment with gifts that give twice. A tabletop spruce tree, perfect for any size home can add greenery and fragrance long past the holidays. And, once the weather is suitable for planting, move your tree into the garden. Or re-gift it to a friend or relative looking to expand their landscape.

Make this a holiday you can relax, enjoy and remember throughout the coming year.

