

Greenery's roots trace back to holiday legends

GARDEN SPOT
MARTY FIGLEY

Many plants are associated with this happy season and can be decorated with tiny lights and perhaps miniature ornaments to add a festive touch. They have colorful legends that add to their intrigue.

Ivy was a symbol of happiness, fertility and honor in Greece; it was woven into crowns and used in wreaths for new year's. Ivy was used as decoration for churches and homes only on the outer passageways and doorways — put up on Christmas Eve and taken down on Candlemas Eve, Feb. 1.

Holly was revered by early British Druids who thought it was a favorite of the sun because it was evergreen. The British hung sprigs of holly about the house as hiding places for Christmas elves and fairies. In Germany, holly was called Christdom, or Christ's crown of thorns — the berries were believed to have been white until stained by Christ's blood.

Legends surrounding European mistletoe go back to Norse mythology — it was the Druid's golden herb. Mistletoe symbolized purity and strength and was hung in houses to bring happiness, promote romance and assure peace. A more recent custom is to be kissed under the mistletoe.

European mistletoe grows on oaks, while the American plant, a different species, grows on maples and tupelos.

The laurel of legend is the European species and was chewed by the priestesses at Delphi to inspire visions and prophecies. It was burned for incense.

When Christianity began, laurel was used to decorate churches and houses at Christmas, and it still spread on church floors on Holy Saturday in some cities in Greece. The American laurel, or our flowering mountain laurel, is also called sweet bay. The leaves are used in cooking.

The herb rosemary is associated with the flight into Egypt by the Holy Family. Mary was sheltered by the plant and legend tells us that when she spread her blue cloak over the branches, the flowers changed from white to blue in her honor. It has been used for many years in Christmas decorations. It is the symbol of remembrance and a token of happiness.

If you plan to give a plant as a gift, perhaps a note about its legend could accompany it.

Book look
Books always make welcome holiday gifts. You may wish to consider one of the following:

"A Garden's Blessings: Refreshment for the Soul," Lois Trigg Chaplin (\$12.95, Augsburg Fortress), contains incidents in the author's life as she tells how her faith has taught her the relationship of nature and the messages of the Bible.

Two books published by Houghton-Mifflin are special. Both are written by Jacqueline Heriteau; watercolors by Susan Davis.

"The Fragrant Flowers Birthday Book" (\$15.95) eloquently describes a flower for each week of each month. Growing instructions and the flower's history are included as well as a space for birthday names for each week.

In "A Feast of Flowers" (\$35), Heriteau relates her experiences and conveys her passion for flowers from the time she was a child in France to her present home in Washington, D.C., and the several gardens she has attended in between. A beautifully written and illustrated book, it can be savored at any time of the year. Many ideas for using and displaying the plants are refreshing and clever.

"A Bulb for All Seasons," Quin Ellis (\$13 Hearst-William Morrow), gives specific instructions about how to grow a bulb each month of the year. Short and sweet, with display ideas and colorful illustrations by Bud Peen.

Waldenbooks or your favorite book store can order any of these books.

come gifts. "The Natural Garden," Ken Druse, and "Herbs: Bouquets, Recipes and Fine Country Things," Emelle Tolley, are \$8.95 each. "Glorious Flowers: The Madeline's Calendar for 1995" and "Gardener's Calendar 365 Page-A-Day," Barbara Damrosch, are \$9.95 each.

■ Dig the hole before the ground freezes for your live Christmas tree.

■ Don't neglect house plants at this busy time. Remove dead foliage and pinch back to shape as necessary.

■ Spray broadleaf evergreens with an anti-desiccant to prevent dehydration, when the temperature is above 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

■ Pot Easter lilies for April flowering.

■ There's still time to prune trees if the temperature is above 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then her mailbox number, 1859. Her fax number is (810) 644-1314.



MARTY FIGLEY

Season's greenings: This ivy is being trained up a wire form. Tiny lights, little ornaments and a branch or two of holly make an easy holiday decoration.

TIMELY GARDEN TIPS

■ Workman calendars make wel-

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5 yr	8.25%	5 yr	8.25%
7 yr	8.75%	7 yr	8.75%
10 yr	9.25%	10 yr	9.25%
15 yr	9.75%	15 yr	9.75%
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