

Mini Christmas Trees, Fascinating And Creative Hobby

According to John Rieck, a New York interior designer who has made a hobby out of creating and decorating miniature Christmas trees, this can be an endlessly absorbing and fascinating pursuit.

Mr. Rieck collects miniature decorations whenever and wherever he can find them. Many antique and curio dealers have learned of his interest, and notify him immediately when any tiny toys or other miniature objects turn up.

One of the best sources for tiny toys are antique doll houses. But other prospects are endless because not all tiny objects are necessarily antiques. When he travels, Mr. Rieck often makes surprising finds. For instance, he found a shop in San Salvador that had hundreds of tiny Mickey Mouses, which are now part of his collection.

Some ornaments are rare and valuable. For example, he discovered some Austrian wax figures, Hansels and Gretels, that were barely an inch high.

Among the other miniature objects Mr. Rieck is on the lookout for are wax angels, teddy bears, toy dogs, mice, animals of all types, shoes, doll furniture, snowmen, soldiers, sleighs, musical instruments, bells, birds, fruit, trains and cars.

Most of these ornaments are made of wood, wax or porcelain. A few are ivory. Birthday cake candles are cut down to represent trees and decorated with pipe cleaners are twisted to form interesting shapes.



MINIATURE CHRISTMAS TREE, John Rieck applies the final touches to one of his charming creations.

There are also many inexpensive, small ornaments to be found in variety stores, which is where Mr. Rieck gets the small, artificial Christmas trees. Usually, he enhances them by adding branches for greater fullness and to accommodate more ornaments. The more ornaments the better, according to Mr. Rieck, because people get great pleasure, discovering each individual one.

Some tiny toys are placed under the tree along with match boxes and pill boxes, which are done up in gay wrappings to look like tiny Christmas presents.

Several of Mr. Rieck's trees are priceless as their treasured Victorian predecessors. Some are kept under glass bell jars.

His elaborate creations are probably quite beyond most of us. However, simpler versions can be done by anyone and children, especially. The use of inexpensive trees can be used and tiny illustrations on Christmas cards can be cut out to serve as decorations. Stars, angels, angels, Santa Claus and other figures, many of which are glittering and colorful indeed. They can be mounted on firm cardboard for extra support before cutting them out. (Use gift boxes for this.) Hanging loops can be attached with a needle and green thread. They should then be filed in their proper categories in envelopes or small boxes. This is an absorbing project for children and adults, with the result in an interesting and inexpensive hobby to enjoy the year-round.

Kissing Under Mistletoe

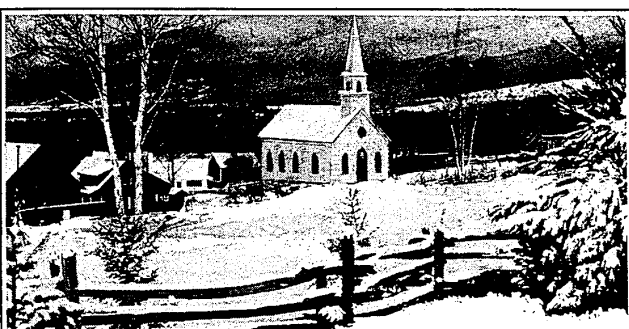
The word "mistletoe" derives from the Anglo-Saxon word "mistel-tan" which is a parasitic plant which grows on evergreen trees, with small yellowish-green leaves, yellowish flowers and waxy white, poisonous berries.

Under a sprig of mistletoe men are by custom privileged to kiss any woman standing under it. The man is supposed to first remove one of the berries and present it to the woman. When all the berries are gone, this kissing game is over. It is thought this custom comes from an early pagan marriage rite.

Mistletoe was considered sacred by the Druids in ancient Britain and they performed elaborate ceremonies around it at the winter solstice. Because of these pagan associations, it is seldom used in church decorations.

How Santa Claus Became An American Christmas Tradition

The tradition that Santa Claus is the giver of Christmas presents comes to us from a fourth century German legend of St. Nicholas (Santa Claus is a German corruption of the name). When St. Nicholas learned of three young women who were unable to attract suitors because their father was too poor to provide them with a dowry, he filled three bags with gold one night



May the peace and serenity of this holiday season fill you with hearthside warmth.

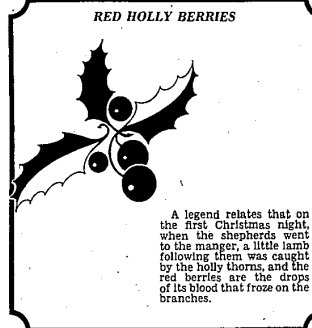
CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

observer newspapers

"Feast of Lights" in Merrie Old England

Over 1400 years ago, the Council of Tours decreed that the celebration of Christmas should continue on for twelve days through Epiphany, which falls on January 6th. This day, also known as the Feast of Lights, is still observed by many churches.

It became customary, through the centuries, for the reigning King of England to open Twelfth Night revels by throwing dice. In the 17th century, Charles II played for high stakes, winning 150 pounds one year and losing 100 pounds the next, both tremendous sums for that period.



RED HOLLY BERRIES

A legend relates that on the first Christmas night, when the shepherds went to the manger, a little lamb following them was caught by the holly thorns, and the red berries are the drops of its blood that froze on the branches.

Discarded Christmas Trees Help Prevent Beach Erosion

Each year, hundreds of volunteers from several Long Island communities gather discarded Christmas trees in order to implant them in the fragile dunes of Fire Island across the bay, which helps to prevent the sand from being blown off and washed away.

Festive Cocktails For Teetotallers

MOD-FASHIONED: Chilled cola and lemon and lime slices and maraschino cherries. MOD-FASHIONED: Chilled orange juice and guinine water mixed half-and-half. Serve as is or over ice cubes.

NEW TWIST: Chilled orange juice and guinine water mixed half-and-half. Serve as is or over ice cubes.

SCARLET SLING: Season chilled tomato juice with dashes of Worcestershire, Tabasco, lemon juice and celery salt. Insert a celery stick stirrer.

RUSSIAN SOUR: Mix equal parts of chilled strong tea and cranberry juice. Add frozen, concentrated, undiluted lemonade to the form of a poem. "The Visit of St. Nicholas." He invited the sleigh and the reindeer and his description of St. Nicholas was suggest-

Gold, Frankincense And Myrrh were the Gifts of the Magi...

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." (Matthew 2:11)

Of these three gifts, only gold is still today a familiar and precious commodity. However, in the time of Christ, both frankincense and myrrh were equally valuable and well-known commodities, used in trade between the Middle East and Mediterranean countries.

Gold, because of its rarity and beauty has been the world's most precious metal since its discovery more than 6,000 years ago. Then, as now, it served as a medium of exchange, and was considered a symbol of wealth and power. Because gold is soft and malleable, it was also used for making fine jewelry and artifacts.

Both frankincense and myrrh are gum resins of trees, which grow only near the monsoon regions of Ethiopia, Somalia and Southern Arabia.

Frankincense, which comes from a tree of the same name belonging to the balsam family, is an aromatic gum resin and was an important ingredient of an incense mixture used in Hebrew religious rituals. It was also used as an air purifier and as a remedy for certain physical ailments.

Myrrh is a fragrant, bitter-tasting gum resin extracted from any of several shrubs, which grow in the same sections as frankincense. It was also used medicinally as a pain killer and in mouthwashes. It is used in some mouthwashes today. Myrrh also was used in many religious ceremonies.

Anyone who is curious about these substances may find them at The American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The Museum usually features all three treasures as part of its December special exhibit.

CENSER, gaily decorated, from Kowak, in use today for burning frankincense.

Photo courtesy The American Museum of Natural History

Christmas Trees Recycled To Balance Our Ecology

Each year whole forests of young spruce trees are chopped down in their prime and displayed with decorations as Christmas trees in millions of American homes. After the two-week holiday season, they are discarded.

But Christmas trees can now be recycled. They can be given a second life in which their organic components can be put to work nurturing other life. A machine known as a wood chipper instantly reduces them to valuable garden mulch.

This mulch retains soil moisture and can be applied on top of snow to protect bulbs and stems of young trees and shrubs. Also, this coarse sawdust-like stuff is as good as salt or sand for improving traction on icy driveways.

While she was asleep, spiders came and crawled from the trees, and she was trailing their lacy webs behind them. To reward the women for their devotion, The Christ Child blessed the tree and all the spider webs were turned into gleaming silver.



The Legend of the Christmas Rose

According to legend a little shepherd girl from Bethlehem followed the shepherds on their way to the manger. All the shepherds had gifts for Jesus but the little girl had none. She felt very sad and unworthy about this and hung back from the others. Just before they reached the stable, an angel appeared in a blaze of light and scattered lovely white roses before the little girl. So she gathered them up and laid them before the manger.

Bertha appeared in their fireplaces and brought with her happiness and good fortune. Dr. Clement Clarke Moore, a professor in the General Theological Seminary in New York, put the myth in the form of a poem, "The Visit of St. Nicholas." He invited the sleigh and the reindeer and his description of St. Nicholas was suggest-

Christmas Cookery: Old and New Traditions In the Baker's Art

The first Christmas trees, which originated in Germany, were decorated with apples, symbolizing Adam's fall, and round wafers, representing the Sacred Host, which signified redemption.

Later, the apples and wafers were replaced by Christmas cookies, which became more and more elaborate through the years. Fancy Christmas cookies were introduced to America in the 18th century by the early German settlers, who counted their old cookie molds, made of clay, tin or wood, among their most treasured heirlooms.

Industrious Pennsylvania Dutch housewives baked them by the washbasketful in such varying shapes as fish, rabbits, men smoking pipes, horseback riders, hatchet-bearing Indians, stars, dolls, and of course all the characters and animals associated with the nativity scene. There were even some reindeer which were over a foot long.

Until the early part of this century, Pennsylvania Dutch Christmas trees were decorated almost entirely with these single ornaments and it was part of the celebration to eat from the tree all through the Christmas season, so that it was practically bare by Twelfth Night. This custom is still followed in Europe.

Outstanding cookie specimens were proudly displayed and used to decorate the windows. Cookies were tucked into Christmas baskets for the poor and it was customary to include several dozen cookies when returning molds that had been borrowed.

Many cookies were handed out to the Belsnickles, those costumed visitors, like mummers, who went from house to house checking up on the children's behavior during the year. It is said that some of the Belsnickles were so terrifying that children were known to confess to hitherto unsuspected misdeeds.



NATIVITY SCENE, Group of cookies with colorful frosting decoration by Mae Gerhard.

Photo courtesy of Museum of Contemporary Crafts of The American Crafts Council

After World War I, as American women began to emerge from the kitchen to go out in the business world and follow more modern pursuits, the practice of making elaborate cookies and breads was largely abandoned.

However, a few years ago, The Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York City put on an exhibit called "The Baker's Art," which traveled to many cities throughout the country. This apparently helped set off a nationwide revival of interest in decorative baking.

Some of the most exciting pieces in this exhibition were submitted by Mae Gerhard, a teacher at The Hussian School of Art in Philadelphia. Miss Gerhard, who learned this traditional art from her Pennsylvania Dutch mother, created a beautiful gingerbread crèche of more than two dozen pieces from five to six inches tall, all decorated in brilliant Byzantine colors. She has also made large and elaborate working models of the dough to Christmas subjects, using a firmer but inedible dough.

Mae Gerhard's Gingerbread Crèche Recipe

(Enough for 1 nativity set)

1/2 cup shortening	1 teaspoon soda
1/2 cup dark brown sugar (firmly packed)	1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup milk	1 1/2 teaspoons ginger
3/2 cups flour (sifted)	2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon vinegar	1/2 cup butter/milk

Cream shortening, sugar and molasses together. Sift flour, salt, soda and spices together. Blend into first mixture, alternating with vinegar and butter-milk. Chill for 1 hour. Roll dough out to 1/4" thickness. Use wax paper pattern and cut with a sharp knife, dipped in flour. Remove the pattern as you transfer the dough to a greased cookie sheet. Bake 10 to 15 minutes in 375° oven.

Decorator Icing

2 cups confectioner's sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 egg whites
Food coloring

Beat egg whites until stiff. Gradually beat in sifted confectioner's sugar. To add food coloring, divide into individual bowls. Add coloring to each bowl until correct shade is obtained. Spread with knife or use decorator tubes or "paint" on with paint brush.

Egg Yolk "Paint"

2 egg yolks plus food color
Apply with paint brush.



NATIVITY SCENE, Inedible dough mounted on wood panel. By Ruth Asawa Lanier.

Photo courtesy of Museum of Contemporary Crafts of The American Crafts Council