

Design-a-tree: from partridges to punk

A LITTLE YULETIDE quiz: Which of the following would you expect to find on a Christmas tree?

1. Heavy metal chains (the kind punks wear to concerts).
2. Plastic tubes (the kind some hospital patients simply can't live without — literally).
3. Plastic cocktail glasses (the kind Alcoholics Anonymous put cocktail peanuts in).
4. A partridge (the sort found in a pear tree).
5. All of the above.

The answer, as unSanta and unsleigh bells as it might be, is No. 5 — All of the above. Christmas trees aren't — and are — what they used to be.

Traditional trees festooned with ribbons and bows, gingerbread people, lace, dried and fresh flowers, bundles of potpourri, angels and other things nostalgic are the majority.

But there are other decorations that take a decidedly avant-garde approach to the season of mistletoe and holly.

Entries in a collegiate design-a-tree contest give the non-conformist several ideas for trimming his tree.

ONE TREE built around a hardware store theme was decorated with non-edible candy canes. The decorations were four-inch aluminum plumbing sleeves wrapped with

red glitter-covered pipe cleaners with pipe cleaner hooks at the top. Clear intravenous tubes were stuffed with the red glitter pipe cleaners and spiraled over the tips of the branches.

A new-wave theme tree was spray-painted black then decorated with bluish-silver chains and geometric, three-dimensional ornaments.

Clear plastic drink cups and an oven were the basic ingredients of another tree. To make the decorations, preheat an oven to 400 F, line cookie sheets with foil, then place the plastic cups right side up on the sheets. Tuck colored plastic beads in the centers of the bottoms of the cups, then pop them into the oven for two minutes.

The cups will melt and collapse on themselves creating crinkled shiny decorations with colored bead centers. When the ornaments come out of the oven, punch a hole in each with a heated nail and tie with ribbon for hanging. The plastic cups look very much like expensive crystal ornaments.

THE 12 days of Christmas was the theme, and gold and white the color scheme of the tree decorated with plastic calling birds, white ceramic geese, foam swans trimmed in gold, ladies dancing, maids-milking and lords-a-leaping. The tree was finished with white ribbon bows.

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