

Holiday Decorating



Outsized Christmas Gear

Last year, in the grips of a global pandemic, the motto for holiday decorating was go big and stay home.

This year, outsized gear is going to remain at the top of everyone's decorating shopping lists. Here are a few things to look for to make your holiday decorating mega fun.

GIANT ORNAMENTS

Look for giant baubles everywhere these season. On lawns, on steps and porches, hanging from eaves, any and everywhere, except for on the tree. Because they're bigger than the tree.

GIANT LIGHTS

This can go two ways. You can have actual physically large lights, which are great additions to outdoor displays. Or, you can have displays dripping with lots of regular-sized lights, inside and out and everywhere else. This year, look for high-tech displays that will connect to each other and even synchronize to music.

GIANT INFLATABLES

Blow up yard decorations get more and more popular — and bigger — every year. Now there are 18-foot-tall Frosties out there just waiting to post up in your yard. Also look for inflatables with motion, such as hands that wave. Also new this year are inflatables with projection that show lights,



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clips of movies and more.

GIANT WREATHS

Along with everything else, wreaths have gotten bigger and more elaborate. And they're no longer just on the front doors. Hang huge wreaths up near the roofline for a eye-drawing out-

door display. Wreaths also make great focal points for large interior walls and even doors inside the home. If you're looking at lighted wreaths, make sure you get the kind with solar panels or battery packs. They don't pack the oomph that their plugged-in

counterparts do, but they're easier to plan without having to use a power cord.

GIANT LASERS

It sounds like something from a science fiction movie, but laser displays are growing in popularity every year. Look

for lasers to light up towering trees in your yard or the blank canvas that is your garage door. It's also a great way to add dimension to your outdoor displays or even to put up an impressive display from ground level without climbing any ladders.



Silver and Gold

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Like the holiday song says, there will be silver and gold decorations on e'ery Christmas tree this holiday season.

There are many ways to use these classic holiday colors in your decorating this year and, believe it or not, there's still some room for innovation. Look for a silver and gold refresher in different finishes, such as matte, and with new textures, such as hammered metals.

ON THE TREE

Shiny is right at home on the tree.

Festoon your tannenbaum with silver and gold jingle bells to add a festive sound for your holiday parties. Also look for the warmth of gold lights on the tree, or pair silver decor with bright white lights. And nothing says you have to keep it one way or the other. Mix both silver and gold decorations with warm jewel tones for a luxe Christmas look that's hard to beat.

IN FOLIAGE

Accent rich holiday greenery with the warmth of gold pine ones, faux fruit and other accents, or take advantage of cool silvers paired with deep green every greens or preserved leaves. Put a coat of metallic paint on existing floral accents to freshen them up for a new

round of holiday festivities.

ON FOOD

Nothing says luxury like edible silver and gold on your food. Add a little bling to your holiday feasts and treats with touches made from edible gold and silver leaf, gold and silver sprinkling sugar, and sprayed gold and silver paint. You can find any and all of these products on the shelves of your local grocery store.

OUTSIDE

You've got to be careful with silver and gold accents outdoors. In sunnier climates, the glare can get to be a little much. But gold lights, especially in a monochromatic scheme, is a classy

addition to your holiday decor. Also, consider using different sized lights to add perspective and depth to your single-colored display. If you're looking for silver lights, look for a strings with cool white lights. Pair them with classic blue lights for a great, classic color combo.

INSIDE

Nothing says cozy like candlelight. Pair warm or cool white candles with silver and gold candlesticks to magnify their light and provide maximum coziness for a cold winter's night. Also look for classic holiday decorations, such as glass Christmas trees, sleighs and more in these metallic combos. You can pair them with just about any color scheme, too, so use them year after year.

Make it a Tropical Holiday

Set a warm, sunny vibe on a cold day with a tropically hued holiday decorating scheme.

We've got everything you need to decorate for a toasty warm beachy celebration this year, from the inside out. A tropical decorating scheme starts with the color palette.

A NEW RANGE OF CHRISTMAS COLORS

Instead of rich jewel tones, you're going to need some new colors in your holiday decorating toolkit. White, of course, is classic, and accents the warm colors of the tropics. You'll also want a beachy tan, evocative of the sand, and some teal tones for water. Otherwise, look for pinks, peachy tones and yellows. As far as fabrics and textures, burlap is at home in a tropical theme, as are cool cottons in colors that accentuate your decor.

ORNAMENTS

Hit up the stores and look for whimsical ornaments on a tropical theme. Anything beachy, palm trees, fruit and more. If you want a more hands-on strategy, head to the craft store and get some shells suitable for crafting and paints. Decorate those shells with acrylic paint and Mod Podge or other sealants. This is also a great job for the kids to help with, too, to create some



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priceless holiday memories.

LIGHTS

This year's technologically advanced lights can even change color, so you're not stuck with either multicolored or white. Look for whites you can make pink, purple or teal.

If those are outside of your budget, stick with classic color schemes and accent it with inflatables and other outdoor decor in a tropical theme. You can also find premade light sculptures in stores in tropical shapes such as flamingos, beach scenes and more.

OUTDOOR DECOR

Now you can really have some fun. Stores now carry inflatable Santa-hat wearing flamingos, Santas with sunglasses and palm trees covered in Christmas lights. You can also find the same types of decorations covered in

metallic tinsel and sisal if inflatables aren't your thing. Pair these with oversized ornaments in tropical colors, an awesome lighting scheme and some speakers blaring "Feliz Navidad" and "Mele Kalikimaka," and you're all set.

Grow your Own Decor

Put a new spin on do-it-yourself holiday decorations by growing your decor this year. These kind of decorations can be left out and enjoyed year-round, and they're a lot of fun, too.

Here are some ways you can go green (literally) this holiday season.

PONYTAIL PALMS

Also called the elephant's foot palm or *beaucarnea recurvata*, the ponytail palm is not a true palm but a member of the family *Asparagaceae*. It's a native of Mexico can live to be more than 350 years old. Ponytails are evergreen plants and can get up to 16 feet tall, but are most usually grown as potted ornamental plants. Their trailing tops (which look like a ponytail, hence the name) are great for hanging tiny ornaments in and their wide bottoms (hence the other name) are a great place to hang a tiny tree skirt. Put a few of these down a long table for a whimsical tropical centerpiece.

SUCCULENTS

These water-sipping houseplants have exploded in popularity recently. Succulents come in a huge variety of unique shapes, colors and sizes, and their tiny footprint means they can fit in almost



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any planter. Grab some Christmas mugs from years past, drill a hole in the bottom for drainage, and pack them with succulents for easy and low-maintenance holiday decor.

TREES EVERYWHERE

Of course, Christmas is all

about the trees. Look for miniature evergreens you can decorate like the bigger ones for tables, sideboards, counters and mantles. In addition to the regular pine, cedar and fir, look for rosemary bushes trimmed into a Christmas-tree shape for a fragrant doppelgänger for your big tannenbaum.

CHRISTMAS CACTUS

Another classic holiday plant is the Christmas cactus, *schlumbergera*. A genus of cacti native to Brazil, these cacti grow on rocks and trees in high humidity environment, so they look a little different than desert cacti. Christmas cacti are so named because

they bloom around Christmastime. Flowers range from pink to white and yellow. Christmas cacti are drought-tolerant and need a free-draining and somewhat acid planting media. They also need minimal light, making them ideal houseplants for the deep winter.

Five Great Tree Motifs

There's a couple of schools of tree decorating. One is to put on every single ornament your children have ever made, ever, top it with tinsel, and go.

The other is a carefully curated theme tree, with a palette and everything. If you'd like to give the second one a go, or if you're just looking for fresh ideas for your tree, keep reading.

HIT THE BEACH

Choose a tree with deep blue-green foliage. If you're a fan of the real tree, look for a Colorado blue spruce, white pine or white spruce. Start out with a foundation of cool white lights, or go for strands that allow you to change colors and pick a light blue, brilliant yellow or a fiery hot pink. Then layer on ornaments. Look for sea shells, palm trees, flamingos and other tropical-themed ornaments. Finish it off with tinsel, if you want, and top your tree with a gold conch shell. Instead of a tree skirt, pull out your summer beach towels to prop your presents on.

GONE FISHING

Start with a deep green tree with a more wild shape than a perfectly groomed cone. Any color lights will work with this scheme, but may we suggest a blue strand or two? Next, grab some fishy ornaments — tropical or freshwater or both, Christmastime is full of magic — and, from the sporting goods aisle, plenty of lures, but snip off the dan-

gerous hooks. You can also make your own baubles out of bobbers and top it all off with a dip net. You'll catch all the presents with this tree.

TASTY TREATS

Foodies, unite! Don we now all the delicious decor. You can use any lights you want, but kick up the festivities a notch with multicolored strands with cut facets to throw down a gorgeous light show. Then top it off with ornaments shaped like food and drink. Even get the family involved by tapping holes in bottle caps and stringing them with twine. Popcorn garlands are also at home on this tree (just make sure to keep it away from pets and kids), as are ornaments made from dried orange slices.

INTO THE WOODS

Choose a real tree with a deep green color and a ton of fragrance. Look for a Scotch pine or Fraser fir. Use warm white lights and top those with ornaments of your favorite woodland creatures. From the craft store, grab a bag of feathers (any and all colors work) and string them into a garland with wooden beads. Look for fabric or a ready-made tree skirt in a Buffalo check to top off this warm and cozy look.



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Yule Know your History

You've seen Yule logs on holiday cards, on holiday screensavers and even in the form of a holiday cake.

But where do we get it from? Keep reading to find out.

ROOTS

The Yule log comes from Europe, where a specially selected log was burnt in the hearth as part of a Christmas tradition. It's not clear where the Yule log comes from, but there's a working theory that it stems from the pagan tradition of holding bonfires to break up the long nights of winter.

TRADITIONS

It's said that once the Yule log has been lit, it's bad luck to have to light it again. Another tradition says the Yule log is burnt in pieces each evening from Christmas to Twelfth Night, then the remainder of the log is placed beneath the bed for luck and protection from lightning and fire. There are other traditions that have you count the sparks and other things as the log burns to predict your future in the new year.

OTHER TERMS

The Yule log may also be called the Yule Clog or the Christmas Block or Gule Block. In Cornwall, England, it was also referred to as Stock



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of the Mock and in Wales, it's the Boncyff Nadolig. French folk call it the *Buche de Noel*, which may derive from the tradition of peasants bringing a log to their lord. In Baltic regions, people celebrate *bluka vikšana*, or log pulling, where a log or stump is pulled

through the village and winter solstice and burned.

CAKE

What would any Christmas tradition be without a cake? The Yule log is also a traditional Christmas cake that hails from France, Belgium,

Switzerland and thereabouts. It's made from sponge cake filled and rolled, then decorated to resemble an actual log. They are often served with one end cut off and laid atop the cake or set on the side to look like a chopped branch. The cake can also be

sprinkled with powdered sugar to resemble snow. Usual fillings and flavorings include chocolate, fruit jams, espresso and liqueurs. The cakes can be decorated with fresh berries, leaves and mushrooms made of marzipan or fondant, and chocolate shavings.

Setting the Perfect Table

The holidays are a time to shine and show off your very best, and that includes as sumptuous meals where it's perfectly fine to push the boat out with the good china and silver.

We've got your guide to setting the perfect holiday table.

CENTERPIECES

For the holiday table that people are going to gather around, choose a long, low vessel to keep the arrangement from impeding conversation. For sideboards, mantles and other areas, feel free to pick taller vases that will draw the eye upwards. Choose floral colors to complement your holiday decor. Jewel tones are popular, and icy whites always look stunning. You can also choose to use evergreens for a touch of holiday fragrance as well.

When arranging your flowers, you can use florists foam or you can just arrange the stems inside the vessel to support the other flowers. Choose greenery with different textures to give your arrangement a more natural depth. After you've arranged your greenery, add textured flowers (think ranunculus or carnations, flowers with layer upon layer of frilled petals). Lastly, working from bottom



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to top, add your statement flowers, such as roses or peonies. Using stem length as a guide, spiral upwards through the arrangement until you reach the top, taking care not to make it so tall your guests won't see over it at the table.

BRING OUT THE GOOD CHINA

Don't be afraid to cart out Grandma's good china for holiday entertaining (remember: she'd want it to go to

good use). Just be careful to clean and store it properly afterward. Start by lining your sink with a towel and then wash each piece by hand. While some lines are now dishwasher safe, cleaning these special pieces by hand is one way to make sure they stay safe from scratches, chips and breakage.

Lay the table with your china and silver, remembering that diners work their way from the outside in with

utensils. Napkins go to the left of the plate, along with the forks. Spoons and knives to the right. The butter knife and bread plate go in the top left, with the dessert spoons and forks in the middle. To the right, water and wine glasses.

To store your china, wash up all the pieces again, then pack them away with newspaper or bubble wrap into boxes. Store those boxes in an out-of-the-way place that's

not exposed to extreme humidity or temperatures. If you display your china when not in use (Grandma would also approve of that), stack plates with thin cloth or foam between each one. Don't stack bowls or cups with handles; place them right-side-up or hanging by the hooks. If you're hanging the plates, place a scrap of cloth between the plates and hanger hooks to keep them from scratching or chipping the plates.