

It's Holiday Decorating Season

By Maria Fox

The changing seasons inspire us to decorate, none more so than the fall. The warm, sunny days are gone, the crispness in the air requires we pull on a favorite cozy sweater, summer annuals begin to slow their parade of blooms, and winter pansies and vibrant mums take their place.

As autumn commences, we embrace it, reveling in this special invitation to nest. And nesting for many of us includes a great American pastime: seasonal decorating.

Everyone has a favorite holiday. Diehard decorators will say they love them all, but the period of autumn through Christmas is known as decorating season. For those of you who are new to the idea of the decorating season, it is sort of like baseball or football season but without the physical contact and away games. In the world of decorating, every game is a home game. The "team" consists of a bevy of charming inanimate objects that seem to come to life when placed in strategic positions around the room. "Tailgating" is done indoors with festive tableware, lots of candles and lovely linens. Friends and family are the biggest fans, aside from the decorator, who can sit for hours in admiration of their creation. In fact, those bitten hard by the decorating bug have been known to secretly go outside and look back inside through the windows (you know who you are), or sneak up on rooms and take a peek inside to see that the décor is not off on an unauthorized time out. **Bottom line: Decorators just can't get enough of the aesthetic stuff. The textures, the colors, the shimmers, the shine — it's all good, especially during the magical weeks of September through December.**

The fall decorating calendar runs something like this: The day after Labor Day is the official start for harvest decorating. This includes an autumn door wreath, gourds, pumpkins and fall flowers planted in outdoor containers. **Starting Oct. 1**, it's time to display the Halloween and Thanksgiving décor, which includes a collection of witches, ghosts or goblins, and turkeys, pumpkins, pilgrims and other harvest items. On Nov. 1, Halloween departs and very slowly, out comes Christmas. Before you gasp at the thought of putting out Christmas decorations in November, think about this: Of all the holidays, Christmas is the big daddy for decorating. Not only is Christmas the most work for the shortest season and the largest monetary investment, it is the most beloved and enjoyed holiday. A strategic approach to Christmas decorating will ease your stress and increase your enjoyment. So right now, ever so slowly start sorting your Christmas decorations and planning what you're going to place and where. You can do this in a back bedroom away from view, though many decorators will go so far as to decorate their trees before or on Thanksgiving Day, since the day after Thanksgiving is official green light day for Christmas. A flip of the switch and voilà! Now you can relax and enjoy your labor of love until **New Year's Day**. The best part about decorating is that anyone can do it anywhere, and small touches mean as much as large statements. **What's** more heartwarming than to see a small smiling jack-o-lantern on a bedside table in a nursing home or a hospital? Or a **small lighted Christmas tree** in a child's bedroom? Seasonal decorating is an exercise in spreading joy. Often these decorations become family treasures, beloved for generations, inspiring memories of those we love. With care we unwrap each piece in reverence for where they've been as well as where the future will take them. Traditions require commitment for them to continue to exist, and they reward our commitment in priceless ways.

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