

10 TIPS for decorating with cheer

If you've lived in the same house for a while, you can decorate for the holidays with your eyes closed. The tree "always" goes in one certain spot. The shrubs "always" get the same treatment, and the swag "always" goes over the same doorway.

It's a shame to be so predictable.

Sure, you may try to liven things up with multi colored lights on the tree for a change, or place peppermint candles on the coffee table while the creche goes on the buffet, but the overall effect is the same.

We at Splash know you need some tips to make your decor more interesting while keeping it simple. Splash readers like to be out and about, experiencing the holidays so they need quick fixes that have a big impact.

Here are some tips from Splash staffers and Carol Campbell from Blue Sky Gifts in Gulf Breeze.

1. CURTAIN TIES
Replace your curtain tie backs with garland. Carol Campbell of Blue Sky Gifts says this will instantly update your room and add a touch of glitz.

2. WRAP FRAMES
Remove the photos and framed art from your walls, wrap them like packages with bows and then rehang. This tip, also from Carol Campbell of Blue Sky Gifts, is inexpensive and instantly updates your entire house for the holidays.

3. CENTERPIECES
The dining room table and coffee table will look more festive with large clear bowls of ornaments or pomegranates.

4. MATCH LIGHTS
your results will look more professional if the lights match. It's the same amount of work, but the end result is

much better if all the lights are the same color, size and type.

5. MANTLE DECOR
Waxy green magnolia leaves, mixed with greenery from your yard, can decorate your mantle. Mix in some cream colored candles for contrast. It's free, fresh and decorative.

6. RECYCLE CUTS
Boughs cut from the bottom of your live tree will add fragrance and decorating interest if you fashion a fresh swag and hang it over a mirror. Add simple red

bows or shiny ornaments to complete the look.

7. BOWS/RIBBON
Bows, bows and more bows... gold or silver or red lengths of ribbon can be tied to door handles on each bedroom, bathroom or exterior doors for a festive holiday look.

8. OUTSIDE DECOR
Decorate your mailbox for the holidays. Gather greenery from your yard, whether it's holly or palm fronds, and secure them to your mailbox with a bright red or gold ribbon.

9. ORNAMENTS
Ornaments can be anything you wish. If you are a beachcomber, use a hot glue gun to fasten hooks onto prize shells and hang from the boughs. One memorable tip is to use any child's toy from a fast food box.

10. PLAN AHEAD
Finish your shopping and decorating by the first week of December so you can spend your time enjoying the holiday concerts and events on the Splash calendar. You'll be more relaxed and have the best season ever.



Christmas breakfast is a snap with this strata

The aroma of breakfast cooking on Christmas morning is sure to rouse family members from their beds, especially if it's this traditional Christmas Strata you prepared the night before.

CHRISTMAS STRATA

INGREDIENTS

9 slices bread, torn into bite size pieces
1/2 cup diced fresh mushrooms
1/2 cup chopped green bell pepper
16 ounces Cheddar cheese, shredded
1/2 cup chopped onion
2 cups cubed cooked ham
8 eggs
2 cups milk

Grease a 9x13 inch baking dish. Layer half of the torn bread in the bottom of the dish. Sprinkle the mushrooms and green bell pepper evenly over the bread layer. Sprinkle with half of the cheese. Top with remaining bread pieces, then layer with the onion and ham.

Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Whisk together eggs and milk; pour over the entire pan. Cover with aluminum foil, and refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).

Bake covered for 35 minutes, then remove foil and bake for an additional 15 minutes, or until top is evenly brown.

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