

# Holiday Decorating



# Skirt Your Tree With Class

Whether chosen to be practical or decorative, tree skirts and tree collars put the finishing touch on a decorated tree.

The tree skirt is a piece of fabric placed on the floor surrounding the Christmas tree. It covers the tree stand and provides a place for presents. A tree collar wraps tightly around the stand, almost like a scarf, to hide the bottom of the tree and the tree stand.

## AS BIT OF HISTORY

Back when Germans first began decorating Christmas trees, they used real candles. They placed a covering under the base of the Christmas tree to protect the floor and collect the wax and needles that fell out of the tree.

Then, around 1879, according to the blog Christmas Tree Source, people started using Christmas tree stands and the mat underneath became what we now know as the tree skirt. It became a boon for those who like to decorate and what was once a simple piece of fabric took on a new life. Families would embroider or quilt them to match their decorating themes. They became the fancy lawn for holiday villages or nativity scenes.

## MATERIALS

From those simple mats to today's decorative masterpieces, tree skirts come in all sorts of different materials and styles. According to House Beautiful, in 2022 you can find skirts made of wicker, felt, faux fur and jute. Other sources offer them in velvet, rattan, silk or chunky knits.

Tree collars can be found in rattan, burlap, seagrass and shiny metals.

You can make them yourself by quilting, knitting or crocheting. For unique touches, add beading, felt appliques or embroidery.

## MEASUREMENTS

The next decision you'll need to make for a tree skirt is what the diameter will be. Some of that will be dictated by the space you have around your tree. The company Christmas Lights Etc. offers size guidelines:

- 56" is best for larger artificial trees, 9' and higher. Live trees 7.5' and higher can use a 56" tree skirt if the tree stand is large in size as well.
- 48" is great for 7.5' Christmas trees.
- 42" - 48" are ideal for 4.5' - 6.5' trees.
- 20" mini tree skirts are for 2- to 3-foot tabletop trees.

## CHRISTMAS TREE COLLARS

Erica Young shared some advice about tree collars with Family Handyman. First, she describes four different kinds:

- **Rings:** Solid, round pieces that can't be adjusted.
- **Square:** Usually made of wood, they fit in with rustic decors.
- **Hinged:** Hinges let you wrap the collar around the tree rather than dropping the tree into the collar.
- **Panels:** Several panels are assembled around the tree and then can be taken apart and laid flat for storage.

She goes on to recommend choosing a collar that matches the rest of your decor in style and theme, using plastic and metal collars for live trees and saving more delicate materials for artificial trees, deciding what sort of features — price, durability, installation ease — are most important to you and measuring the tree stand.



# Nativity Scenes

Nativity scenes, also called creches, have a long history and are a traditional part of Christmas decorations for many families and churches.

## HISTORY

Nativity scenes date back centuries. According to “The Life of St. Francis of Assisi” by St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan monk, the first person to stage a nativity scene was St. Francis of Assisi in 1223. Pope Honorius III gave St. Francis permission to set up a manger with an ox and an ass in a cave on Christmas Eve in the Italian village of Greccio. He then preached to villagers as they looked upon the nativity scene.

According to Guideposts Magazine, the practice spread and within a century, nativity scenes with statues rather than living people and animals could be found in nearly every Italian church at Christmas time.

The oldest-known Nativity set can be found in Italy, a group of marble figures that are in Rome’s Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore. Believed to have been created by the sculptor Arnolfo di Cambio, the figures are thought to have been created between 1284 and 1289.

The largest known nativity scene was created over a period of 60 years by Tomáš Krýza, a weaver who lived in what is now the Czech Republic from 1838 to 1918. According to the



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Guinness Book of World Records, he created a display that featured 1,389 figures of humans and animals. Today, it is housed in a museum in Jindřichuv Hradec.

## TRADITIONS

There are many traditions surrounding the nativity scene and they often vary from family to family. Perhaps the most common tradition -- and one followed by many outdoor and

public nativity scenes is that the Christ child is not placed in the manger until Christmas Eve.

In some families, the creche is set up in one room and then the statues of the Holy Family, shepherds and wise men are put in other areas and travel a little closer to the manger every day. The Holy Family and shepherds arrive Christmas Eve and the Magi don’t arrive until Epiphany, Jan. 6.

Other traditions surround who gets to place the Christ child in the manger. An Italian tradition is that the oldest member of the household gets to do it while other families give the honor to the oldest child.

## SETTING THE SCENE

Sevelli Group, a religious store in Vatican City that dates back to 1898, recommends the following steps for setting up a

nativity scene:

1. Find a place for your nativity set.
2. Decide how and where you will place the Holy Family.
3. Display the Magi away from the manger and move them closer day by day until Epiphany.
4. Choose what other figurines you want — the animals, shepherds, angels and children.
5. Add lights to brighten your nativity set.

# Bring Holiday Cheer to Work

Holiday decorating doesn't have to be limited to your home.

Given how many hours people spend at work, it makes sense to decorate one's work space with seasonal cheer.

Be respectful of the diverse cultures of your co-workers when you are decorating your cubicle. Consider adding elements of different winter holidays or staying away from anything that would fall outside the realm of professionalism.

## GET INSPIRED

People love to share their creative achievements on social media. If you're looking for inspiration, turn to Pinterest, Instagram or even TikTok for a treasure trove of images people have created to show off how they have decorated their work spaces. You'll find everything from light displays to cardboard winter houses to garland and electric candles. In many cases, you can message the creator and ask for advice on how to replicate it.

Another source of inspiration is pictures from office decorating contests.

## TREE TRIMMING

Decorating a holiday tree can be an all-office team building activity. Each person can bring in or make an ornament. At a



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large organization, each department can have their own tree and its members decide what their theme is going to be.

## LIGHT DISPLAYS

One easy way to brighten up your work space is to bring in strands of holiday lights and festoon them around your cubicle or office.

It can be as simple as a string of white lights or a more elaborate display of multiple lights that flash or outline holiday shapes.

## HOLIDAY THEMES

Teambuilding.com offers some holiday inspiration by suggesting several decorating themes to get people in the spirit. They include:

- Gingerbread village.
- Toy factory.
- Sweets and treats.
- Nutcracker suite.
- 12 Days of Christmas.
- Christmas movie scenes.
- Cozy cabins.

## SUPPLIES

You don't want to break your

holiday budget purchasing decorations for the office.

Sometimes the simplest of supplies can have a cheerful effect — lights, garland, wrapping paper, ribbons, balloons or candy canes.

It's also a great time to go green and use recycled items. Arnolds Office Furniture suggests combining paper cups with garland or saving old paper towel tubes to wrap with red and white ribbons or decorate with Sharpies to create candy canes. They shared how

one person took larger-sized cardboard tubes that were being thrown out and transformed her cubicle into a holiday log cabin.

Another example involved using brown wrapping paper or cardboard to create a gingerbread house.

Maybe you don't have time or the creative urge to do a lot of holiday decorating? If so, you can add a dash of seasonal cheer by picking a screensaver with a roaring fire or a winter wonderland scene.

# Let a Menorah Lead the Way

Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, is a perfect time to decorate the house with menorahs or hanukkiah of all kinds.

## FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

The Festival of Lights is a Jewish holiday dating back to the 2nd century. It celebrates the Maccabees revolting against the Greeks who were defiling the temple and installing an altar to Zeus. When it came time to re-dedicate the temple, there was a shortage of oil; they had enough for only one day. However, it managed to last for eight days until more oil could be pressed.

While it is a minor holiday in religious terms, it is popular among secular Jews in North America because it occurs around the same time as Christmas and gives them something to celebrate at the same time as their non-Jewish neighbors.

The holiday involves lighting a menorah, playing games of dreidel, singing Hanukkah songs and eating oil-based food. It lasts for eight days and celebrants often exchange gifts of “gelt,” either money or golden coins of chocolate.

## CANDLE AND OIL MENORAHS

The oldest form of menorah are candle- and oil-lit ones. Oil menorahs were what the



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first Jews to celebrate Hanukkah used. Many people still consider it a beautiful option that is easy to care for. Oil menorahs need glass cups or bulbs, wicks and oil. You can control how long the light will burn by how much oil you put in the cups.

Candle menorahs give you the option of selecting candles that reflect your other holiday decorations and home décor. It can also be a fun activity with children, giving each family member a chance to pick out candles for a given day.

If you are using candle menorahs, make sure you have a drip cup and a drip tray so you don't get wax on your furnishings.

You will need a total of 44 candles for the holiday. One candle is added each night and there is an extra shamash every night. The shamash is the ninth candle in the menorah and is used to light the others.

## ELECTRIC MENORAHS

Open flames always present a safety risk. Menorahs that

are plug-in or battery operated can provide a beautiful alternative if the light is going to be unattended, if there are young children or rambunctious pets around, or if they are being posted in places where open flames aren't allowed (such as schools, offices, dorm rooms or hospitals).

Some electric menorahs let you control each candle individually while others only light up the entire thing. Some major types of electric menorahs are:

- Mini electric menorahs.

- Large plug-in menorahs.
- LED-lit menorahs.

## MODERN MENORAHS

While the traditional menorah features one tall candle in the middle surrounded by four tapers on each side in a line, modern menorah makers have branched out to create menorahs to match any decor. Some are art deco, others appeal to children in shapes of such things as trucks or animals or princesses, and still others take on geometric or floral forms.

# Kwanzaa Colors and Symbols

A celebration that lasts seven days, from Dec. 26 to Jan.

1, Kwanzaa is a celebration of African American and Pan African culture.

A holiday replete with meaning, there are many ways you can decorate your home to reflect the seven principals and the seven symbols of Kwanzaa.

## COLORS

The colors of Kwanzaa are black, red and green — colors identified by civil rights activist Marcus Garvey as part of his mission to unite people of African descent globally. Each color has a specific meaning. Oprah Daily explains that black is the symbol of the people, red represents the struggle or bloodshed in the past and green symbolizes the earth and the abundance of possibilities that the future holds.

Most Kwanzaa decorations make use of these colors, whether it is in the displaying of the Bendera Ya Taifa (the traditional Kwanzaa flag), the colors of candles or the design of posters sharing the seven principles.

## SEVEN SYMBOLS

If you're trying to pick Kwanzaa decorations, a good starting point are the seven symbols. According to the official Kwanzaa website, each symbol represents the values



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and concepts important to African culture and contributes to community building. The symbols, given in Swahili and English, are:

- **Mazao/The Crops:** Symbolic of African harvest celebrations, decor for this symbol can include sheaves of wheat or platters of fruits and vegetables (real or artificial).

- **Mkeka/The Mat:** A traditional straw or woven textile mat serves as the base for the other six symbols — something

on which they can be rested.

- **Kinara/The Candle holder:** A candelabra that holds seven candles, a black one in the middle, three red ones and three green ones, the kinara is a central part of the celebration, holding the candles (see below) that are lit each night. It is available in many different designs.

- **Muhindi/The Corn:** Corn symbolizes children and the future they represent. Typically at least two ears of corn are

placed on the Mkeka, representing either the children of the family or the children of the community.

- **Kikombe cha Umoja/The Unity Cup:** The cup is symbolic of unity among the people. Some families will make a unity cup together while others will buy them, preferably from local artisans of color.

- **Mishumaa Saba/The Seven Candles:** These are the colored candles that are put into the kinara. There are seven can-

dles, one for each of the Nguzo Saba, the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa.

- **Zawadi/The Gifts:** According to Henry Ford Community College's president, Russ Kavalhuna, the gifts are given on the seventh day of Kwanzaa and are intended to encourage growth and success. The gifts are often handmade and are symbolic of the labor and love of parents and the commitments that children make and keep.

# The Nutcracker

While nutcrackers of all sorts get used throughout the year, the iconic nutcracker soldier dolls come marching out around Christmas-time each year.

They show up as toys, collectibles, decorations, and even on Christmas sweaters.

## HISTORY OF THE NUTCRACKER DOLL

The traditional nutcracker doll is typically a toy soldier with tufts of hair made from white rabbit fur and a crown or helmet of some type. The originals come from a mountainous region in Germany near the Czech border, known as Erzgebirge or “ore mountains.” A mining town, when the deposits started to run out, the miners began making nutcrackers and other holiday decorations, according to *The Frontier Post*.

In the early 1800s, the nutcrackers started out as representations of authority figures — political leaders, police officers and military personnel. The idea was that common people could order their superiors to work for them cracking nuts open.

It was one of those Ore Mountain carvers who, in 1870, created what is now the iconic Nutcracker look. Friedrich Wilhelm Fuchtners became known as the “father of the Nutcracker” and his iconic soldier doll went into widespread production. Today, the eighth generation of Fuchtners are still running the family business in Seiffen.

## COMING TO AMERICA

While nutcracker dolls have been around for centuries, it was only in the 1950s that they began to be popular in the United States. In 1944, “The Nutcracker” ballet by Tchaikovsky, based on a short story by E.T.A. Hoffmann and adapted by Alexandre Dumas, came to the U.S. for the first time, getting a professional production in San Francisco. Then George

Balanchine, a famous ballet choreographer, brought it to New York City in 1954.

Since then, “The Nutcracker” has been an iconic standard every November and December around the U.S. Like its hero, Clara, fans of the Nutcracker frequently like to collect the dolls in one form or another.

The ballet isn’t the only way the dolls came to the U.S. Arlene Wagner, the curator of the Leavenworth Nutcracker Museum, said that American G.I.s played a large role in introducing the nutcracker dolls to American collectors. Soldiers stationed in West Germany after World War II ended started buying the dolls and sending them home as Christmas gifts.

## TODAY’S NUTCRACKERS

Nutcrackers continue to be popular in nearly any shape or form. The traditional Prussian soldier look continues to be popular around Christmas time, but so do many other designs. They range from Pez dispensers to high-end collectibles, from hand-made to mass produced. They are available in all sorts of themes, whether Star Wars figurines or animals or characters from the iconic ballet.

If you’re thinking of starting a collection, consider strolling through your local gift shops and seeing what options they carry. This lets you develop a personal relationship with the store owner or manager who can help keep an eye out for special editions that they know you might be interested in.

And if you are in Washington, swing by Leavenworth to visit the Nutcracker Museum. Not only do they have the nutcrackers associated with Christmas, but they have some ancient ones that date back thousands of years.



# The Perfect Tree Topper

A holiday tree's crowning achievement is the tree topper, the decoration that can tie all your decorating themes together.

Choosing a tree topper becomes an important purchase as many toppers get used year after year and some are even passed down through generations.

## TYPES OF TREE TOPPERS

Tree toppers are limited only by the imagination. They can speak to your personality as well as tying together decorating themes.

Traditional tree toppers include stars, angels, bows, snowflakes or bouquets. If you're looking for something more whimsical, you might get a tree topper in the shape of a top hat, a reindeer, a red truck, a gnome or such characters as King Kong or Yoda. If you have a children's tree, you might top it with ornaments in the shape of Santa, Snoopy, stuffed animals or stars made of candy.

You may also seek out a unique tree topper or one that takes advantage of modern technology. You can order a tree topper in which wire strands spell out your family name. Some tree toppers have LED projectors that project such shapes as stars upon the ceiling above the tree. Some tree toppers you can control from your smart phone or a



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remote control to change the colors of the lights or the order in which they flash or play music.

Another option is to make your own tree topper. You are likely to find great ideas for how to do that at your local craft store.

## HEIGHT OF THE TREE TOPPER

Another factor to consider is the size of the tree topper. You want to make sure there is enough room between the top of the tree and the ceiling

to accommodate the topper. Generally speaking, you want to have at least six inches of space between the ceiling and the top of your tree topper.

If you have a standard 9-foot ceiling, follow these guidelines provided by Balsam Hill, a maker of Christmas trees:

- 4- to 5.5-foot tree can have a tree topper that is 5 inches tall by 6 inches wide.
- 6- to 6.5-foot tree can have a tree topper 7 inches tall by 5 inches wide.
- 7- to 7.5-foot tree can have

a tree topper 4 inches tall by 4 inches wide.

## TREE TOPPER WEIGHT

Most tree toppers are made of lightweight fabrics such as paper, fabric, plastic or fiber composites so that they balance well on the tree. If your topper is made of something heavier, such as glass, take extra steps to secure it. Zip ties can be useful.

Balsam Hills recommends standing a tree topper on your palm. If it starts to tilt within three seconds, you'll need extra support.

## SAFETY TIPS

Once you've picked out a topper, it's time to place it on the tree. Start by gathering any tools you will need to secure the topper to the tree.

Ask a friend or family member to hold the tree steady while you put the topper in place. Use a stable stepladder to reach the top of the tree.

For a pre-lit tree topper, make sure that all the wires and plugs are working. Inspect the topper for burnt-out or cracked bulbs before plugging it in.