

EVERGREEN BASKET

Lesson developed by: Karen Thomas, CDP, Summit County Master Gardener Volunteer

Introduction:

This activity, designed to be used as a 1-to-1 cart activity or in small groups, provides an opportunity to enjoy the sensory delights of fresh evergreens; share memories of holiday celebrations and traditions; appreciate evergreen plant varieties; and, create a fresh-cut evergreen decoration for celebrating the holiday season. Evergreens can stay fresh and fragrant for 2-3 weeks if stems are pre-soaked and foam blocks are kept moist.

Materials and supplies:

- Fresh evergreen foliage such as pine, fir, hemlock, arborvitae, and taxus; and any of the nonprickly types and parts of spruce, juniper and holly.
- Hand pruners and work gloves for cutting and trimming the evergreens
- Bucket for pre-soaking trimmed evergreen stems
- One waterproof container base per person. Disposable cereal bowls or other small food containers work well.
- Wet floral foam oasis, steak knife, tub for pre-soaking foam blocks
- Sticky floral tape, scissors, floral wire, wooden floral picks
- Fillers such as eucalyptus, small pine cones pre-attached to wooden floral picks with wire, artificial flowers, artificial holly berry sprigs, Baby's Breath and mini carnations
- Trimmings such as red velvet bows, pre-wired jingle bells, and wrapped candies
- Baskets, saucers, or foil paper to display each waterproof container holding the evergreen arrangement
- Wet-wipes for cleanup of sticky resins on fingers after handling the evergreen stems

Advance Preparations:

2 hours to 1 day ahead – Clean, cut and condition evergreens: Wash and rinse evergreens in warm water under the tap or in a sink tub (add a drop of dish soap if



foliage is dirty). Remove any berries. Cut the evergreens into 6" -8" stem lengths. Put stems in a pail of tepid water and set aside for an hour or overnight to allow the stems to fill-up with water and stay fresher longer.

A few minutes ahead:

- Remove bottom 2" of needles from evergreen stems (see pix #1).



Pix #1

- Cut the oasis into blocks sized to fit snugly into the container base. If using a shallow basket, cut the foam block to extend 1- inch higher than the container base rim. If using a taller basket, cut the foam block to the same height as the container base rim (see pix #2 and pix #3).



Pix #2

- Float each piece of pre-cut foam oasis in a pan of tepid water until it is saturated with water. Place the piece of pre-soaked foam oasis into the container and criss-cross with strips of floral tape to reinforce a snug fit (see pix #3).



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Pix #3

**Introduction to Participants:**

Show a sample evergreen basket. Pass around samples of the different evergreens so participants can enjoy their scent and feel. Ask: what do we like about evergreens? what kinds of evergreen decorations do you enjoy during the holidays?

Discuss different types of evergreens and ways their features are often different from other trees. You could ask mention that evergreens are called conifers because they are cone-bearing plants. Conifers are grouped into 5 families: pine, fir, spruce, hemlock and juniper.

Pine trees were the first seed-bearing plants on Earth. They are able to survive all kinds of challenges. Their needle-shaped leaves shed snow. The waxy coating on their needles helps them stay moist during hot, dry weather. Their thick bark insulates and protects them in forest fires.

Giant Redwoods and Sequoias, both Pine family members, are the largest living things that have ever existed on Earth. In Ohio, pine trees are second only to oak trees in importance to wildlife. Rabbits and deer eat their bark. Birds and squirrels eat their seeds.

Assembly of the Evergreen Basket:

Give the participant a container base with the pre-soaked foam block taped into place.

Help the participant get started by inserting the evergreen stems into the foam in 1 of 2 of the ways described below (see pix # 4) :

- 1) If using a shallow basket, start by inserting 1 or 2 stems horizontally into each of the 4 sides of the foam block. Then, insert evergreen stems upright into the top of the foam block.
- 2) If using a tall basket, start by inserting stems upright into the top of the foam block.

Add fillers. Help participant to select and poke each filler into the top of the foam block in-between and among the evergreen stems (see pix #5).

Pix #4



Add trimmings. Help participant select and place bows, pine cones, wrapped candies, etc.

Snip off the tips of any evergreens, which stick out too far, in order to create a pleasing composition.

Place the container base into the basket (or a substitute saucer, bowl or foil paper).

Use wet-wipes to remove sticky resin from fingers after handling evergreens.



Pix #5

Every 3-5 days, check the wetness of the foam block and add a little water to the container base if the top of the block feels dry.

Note: To recycle project materials:

- Keep the evergreen needles, chop in a blender and add to sachet. Keep the foam blocks, layout to dry on newspaper, and store in a dry place to reuse. Keep and store the reusable filler and trimmings.

Resources:

[A Calendar Year of Horticultural Therapy](#), Janice Hoetker Doherty, Lilyflower Publishing; and [Growing Together](#), Betty Morgan, HTR, 1989 and 1990

Contact information:

If you have any questions about this activity, please email mgs SummitCounty@gmail.com.

We hope you benefitted from this activity. Please let us know if you utilized this with a quick email to the above address. Please send your name, facility name, number of participants involved in this activity, and your feedback for improvement so we can measure our impact and improve this product. Thank you!