



DECEMBER DECOR

How to Flock Your Christmas Tree

CONTRIBUTOR: SCOTT BOAMAN

Original article from <http://apumpkinandprincess.com>

STEP #1:

Protect your floors by using a large tablecloth or tarp under your tree. Wear a face mask and prepare the flocking by adding a cup into the strainer. You will want to keep the flocking nearby as you will need to refill often.

STEP #2:

Work in small sections starting from the bottom up. If you have a tree that attaches in 3 sections, add the bottom section first. Once you've flocked that section you can add the second.

STEP #3:

Start flocking! To do this you will need to spray and shake the strainer over the tree at the same time. I sprayed with my left hand and lightly sprinkled the flocking

with my right. The flocking and water will bond together and attach itself to the tree. I hope I'm explaining this correctly but once you get the hang of it, it's quite easy to do. You don't necessarily spray the tree branches but instead spray in the direction of the tree at the same time the flocking is falling down. The two will bond together and stick to the branches. You can add as much flocking as you'd like, depending on how white you want your tree to look.

STEP #4:

Once your bottom layer is flocked, work on the second then the top. The package directions say it take 6-36 hours for the flocking to dry. It was in the mid 70's when I flocked my tree and it was pretty dry in a few hours. I would definitely

recommend waiting at least overnight before decorating.

LESSONS LEARNED:

This is messy! The tarp is essential, especially if you are flocking indoors. The white flocking tends to spread but thankfully it's easy to sweep and vacuum up.

Keep your windows open or do this in a well ventilated area. If I decide to flock another tree I might do it in the garage next time. Then again moving it inside might leave a trail of flocking. But like I said it's easy to clean up either way.

One box of flocking is plenty for a 7.5ft tree. I could easily flock a smaller tree and a couple of wreaths with the leftover flocking.



Recipe of the Month: Gingerbread Cake with Cinnamon Cream Cheese Frosting

CONTRIBUTOR: JONATHAN "JJ" JEROTZ

Original recipe from www.eatingwell.com

INGREDIENTS:

350g | 12.3oz plain flour
 330g | 11.6oz dark brown sugar
 2 tablespoons of ground ginger
 2 tablespoons of ground cinnamon
 1 teaspoon ground cloves
 1 tablespoon baking powder
 1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
 1/2 teaspoon salt

3 large eggs
 2 tablespoons of treacle (molasses)
 200g | 7oz cold unsalted butter, cubed
 200ml | 7fl oz whole milk + 1 tablespoon fresh orange or lemon juice
 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
 zest of 1 orange
 3 tablespoons of very finely diced candied

(crystallised) ginger

Frosting:

300g | 10.5oz full-fat cream cheese
 1/2 tablesooon ground cinnamon (or vanilla paste)
 400g | 7oz double cream, whipped to soft peaks
 200g | 7oz icing (powdered) sugar

PREPARATION:

PREP TIME

15

MINS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and line three cake tins or spray with cake release.
- 2 Sift all of the dry ingredients and add them to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Mix on low speed to combine.
- 3 Add the cubed butter and mix for a couple of minutes until the mixture resembles sand.
- 4 Add the eggs, one by one, mixing well after each addition. Mix in the treacle.
- 5 Add the milk, vanilla extract and zest and beat together. Stop and scrape the bottom and sides of the mixing bowl. Continue mixing for a couple of minutes until batter is smooth.
- 6 Fold the chopped ginger into the batter and divide between the prepared cake tins.

COOK TIME

25

MINS

- 7 Bake for 20-25 minutes until a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean. Cool completely before frosting.
- 8 Make the frosting. Whip the double cream and icing sugar (using your stand mixer) till you have soft peaks. Transfer to another bowl.
- 9 Place the cream cheese and ground cinnamon in the bowl of your stand mixer and whip until soft and fluffy. Slowly add the whipped cream and whip together briefly until combined. Don't whip for too long.
- 10 Add a generous amount of frosting on your bottom cake layer and smooth. Top with the second layer and repeat. Add the third layer and then smooth some frosting over the top and sides of the cake. You can leave the cake showing through to achieve the 'naked' cake look or do a crumb coat then chill the cake. Add another layer of frosting and smooth over the cake.
- 11 Top with meringue kisses or gingerbread cookies.

Drink of the Month: Cranberry Glogg

CONTRIBUTOR: STEVE EMMINGER
Full recipe on <http://tasteofhome.com>

Winter's the perfect time to cozy up to this hot drink!



INGREDIENTS:

- 4 cups cranberry sauce
.....
- 2 cups ruby port wine or grape juice
.....
- 1 cup golden raisins
.....
- 1/4 cup sugar
.....
- 2 cinnamon sticks (3 inches)
.....
- 4 cardamom seeds
.....
- 6 whole cloves

P R E P T I M E

30
M I N S

S E R V E S

7

INSTRUCTIONS:

In a large saucepan, combine the cranberry juice, wine, raisins and sugar. Place the cinnamon, cardamom and cloves on a double thickness of cheesecloth; bring up corners of cloth and tie with string to form a bag. Add to the pan.

Bring just to a simmer (do not boil). Reduce heat; simmer gently, uncovered, for 15 minutes or until flavors are blended. Discard spice bag. Serve warm in mugs with additional cinnamon if desired. Yield: 7 servings.



5 Health Tips for the Holiday Season

CONTRIBUTOR: JEFF BLACKWELL

Full workout on <http://active.com>

December is usually synonymous with an abundance of eating and a lack of exercise. We want to encourage you to start this New Year on the right foot. The holidays are a time for celebration and family, not to put on weight. It's almost as if we've come to accept that we are going to put on 10 pounds during each holiday season.

Celebration doesn't have to mean gluttonous eating, or deprivation for that matter. It's time to bring the focus back to the purpose of the holiday. Enjoy your friends and family, the time off and the traditions of the holidays.

The holiday season might not be a time to lose weight, but it doesn't have to be a time to lose your health. The key is to go into the holidays with a plan. Here are five ways to keep your health over the holidays.

TIP #1: SHOP WELL FOR YOURSELF

It is more important than ever to stock your kitchen with healthy foods. Have healthy snacks handy. The more convenient they are, the more likely you are to eat them. Instead of thinking about what you shouldn't eat, promise to eat your 3 to 5 servings of vegetables each day.

TIP #2: SCHEDULE YOUR EXERCISE

Keep your water bottle with you at all times. You should be drinking eight, 8-oz glasses of water each day. One handy trick is to buy a 64 ounce water jug. Fill it up in the morning and know that you need to finish it by the end of the day.

TIP #3: JUST SAY NO

You probably aren't aware of how much extra food you consume just from people offering it to you. A sample at the market here, an extra cookie at an office party there and it all adds up. Just think twice before you

take that food and decide if you really want it.

TIP #4: SKIP THE BAKING

Do you make baked goods for giving? Chances are you eat much of what you bake. Who wouldn't? Instead make non-food gifts, or prepare ingredients for baked goods and put them in pretty jars--let your gift recipient bake it up. That way, they can eat it when they want it and you don't have to be tempted in the kitchen.

TIP #5: HYDRATE

Keep your water bottle with you at all times. You should be drinking eight, 8-oz glasses of water each day. One handy trick is to buy a 64 ounce water jug. Fill it up in the morning and know that you need to finish it by the end of the day.



Your Cat Loves Hopping into Boxes. Here's Why...

Original article by Amy Drew

<http://washingtonpost.com>

Twitter's been on fire with people amazed by cats that seem compelled to park themselves in squares of tape marked out on the floor. These felines appear powerless to resist the call of the **#CatSquare**.

This social-media fascination is a variation on a question I heard over and over as a panelist on Animal Planet's "America's Cutest Pets" series. I was asked to watch video after video of cats climbing into cardboard boxes, suitcases, sinks, plastic storage bins, cupboards and even wide-necked flower vases.

"That's so cute ... but why do you think she does that?" was always the question. It was as if each climbing or squeezing incident had a completely different explanation. It did not. It's just a fact of life that cats like to squeeze

into small spaces where they feel much safer and more secure. Instead of being exposed to the clamor and possible danger of wide-open spaces, cats prefer to huddle in smaller, more clearly delineated areas.

When young, they used to snuggle with their mom and litter mates, feeling the warmth and soothing contact. Think of it as a kind of swaddling behavior. The close contact with the box's interior, we believe, releases endorphins — causing pleasure and reducing stress.

The box may have no walls at all but simply be a representation of a box — say, a taped square on the ground. This virtual box is not as good as the real thing but is at least a representation of what might be — if only there was a real square box to nestle in. This virtual

box may provide some misplaced sense of security and psychosomatic comfort.

The cats-in-boxes issue was put to the test by Dutch researchers who gave shelter cats boxes as retreats. According to the study, cats with boxes adapted to their new environment more quickly compared with a control group without boxes. The conclusion was that the cats with boxes were less stressed because they had a cardboard hide-hole to hunker down in.

Without a real box, a square on the ground may be the next best thing for a cat, though it's a poor substitute for the real thing. Whether a shoe box, shopping bag or a square on the ground, it probably gives a cat a sense of security that open space just can't provide.



Winter is Coming

AUTHOR: Sarah Lindsey

Full article on <http://www.linkedin.com/in/crafthomeloans>

Are you ready to save some money?

The end of the year is all about gift giving and family gatherings, but what about buying a home? In most parts of the country the weather is lousy and between holiday parties, finding gifts for those on your list, and making a new year's resolution that will actually stick longer than six weeks, you probably couldn't imagine having one more thing to do. If saving money is high on your list of priorities, then there are a few good reasons why a new home shouldn't get lost in the winter chaos.

Lower Prices – A 2016 study by Nerdwallet analyzed the previous two years of listings and sales in the 50 most popular metros and found that sale prices peaked in the summer months and fell in fall and were the lowest in winter. Home prices were

8.45% cheaper on average in January and February compared to June-August. As an example, the Census Bureau states that the median home price as of the third quarter of 2017 is \$315,200. An 8.45% reduction in this sales price would equal a \$26,634 savings!

Less Competition – Like all the reasons I stated in the opening paragraph, holidays and cooler weather keep buyers at bay during the winter months. Also, ask any one that has been looking at buying a home this year, tight inventory in starter and move up homes add additional stress with lots of competition that have led into bidding wars. Just like Black Friday shopping is easier on Sunday (most retailer specials are all weekend), with fewer buyers to compete with in winter months there is less pressure that can make the home search

quicker, easier, and less stressful.

Motivated Sellers - Sellers who list their home in winter months are normally highly motivated to get it off the market. Why else would a seller want a bunch of strangers traipsing through their home in midst of holidays and winter chaos? There is normally a very good reason why they aren't waiting for warmer months and more buyer demand. Whatever the reason, it can give you even more leverage to save big!

Lower prices, less competition, and motivated sellers. That would equal the perfect gift of savings for the financially savvy home buyer. If you can purchase your home before the end of the year, you might even be able to take advantage of tax breaks associated with home ownership...consider that the big, glittery bow on top.