

## RENO ZONE

# Crafting your own Christmas wreath



Jennifer Blyth photos

Tarra Darwin, from In Bloom Floral Boutique in the Saanich Centre, offers her how-to tips for creating the perfect wreath or centrepiece for your holiday décor.

By Jennifer Blyth  
Black Press

For many homeowners, a holiday wreath is as much a part of their holiday as the turkey dinner. Wreaths can dress up the inside or outside, and now come in an array of shapes, sizes and materials that can suit any decor.

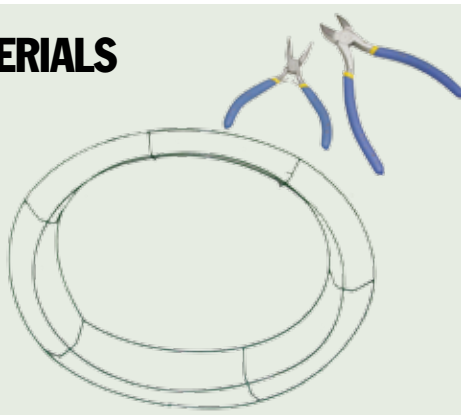
Even better, for those appreciating the natural beauty of a more traditional green wreath, the ample materi-

als available on the West Coast make this a very affordable project. Just take a walk through your garden to choose a variety of colours and textures that appeal. To learn just "how to" put it all together, *Coastal Living* chatted with Tarra Darwin, who with husband Kelly owns In Bloom Floral Boutique in the Saanich Centre.

(For those wanting to try their hand at a table centrepiece, check out the accompanying sidebar, using many of the same materials)

## MATERIALS

- Hand pruners
- Needlenose pliers
- Wire cutters
- Wreath frame
- Florist's wire
- Assorted greenery, berries, synthetics and accessories, appropriate for the final hanging location of your wreath
- Glitter (optional)
- Gloves (optional)



## DOWN TO WORK

**1.** The first task is collecting greenery, either from your own garden or a florist. Cedar makes a good base, as it's not only plentiful, but its shape also provides a good platform on which to build. For visual interest, you'll want a few different kinds of greenery in addition to the cedar – perhaps some fir, pine or yew, or, for something a little more exotic, visit the florist for some eucalyptus. "I like to have three different types of greens – it just gives it a little more texture," Darwin says.

Holly is another natural choice, but while the leaves will hold up well throughout the holiday, the berries may not. (A few well-positioned synthetic holly berries could fill the gap, however). A wreath using these natural materials works best hung outside as inside temperatures will dry it quickly. Outside, the natural humidity should keep it looking fresh. "If you put it up at the beginning of December, it should last through New Year's," Darwin says.

Finally, decide if you want to give your greens a little sparkle. Here, Darwin chose a coppery colour scheme for a more sophisticated appearance, using a lovely wide, wired ribbon, some synthetic grasses and small Christmas balls. Remember that if your wreath will be exposed to the elements, and not protected by house eaves or overhangs, you'll need to choose your accessories accordingly.

**2.** Now, begin by laying your base – in this case, cedar – around the wreath frame. Note that cedar will have a top and bottom side, so be sure to have the "top" facing up. Using the florist wire, attach the cedar to the frame. Top with your second layer of greenery,

tucking stems under the previous layer, then attach your "top coat." Darwin chose to use a second variety of cedar, then eucalyptus, although pine or holly would also work well.

**3.** With your greenery secured to the frame, it's time to accessorize. If you're stumped for ideas, walk around the craft store for inspiration or thumb through a few magazines until you see a style you like. "You don't always have to do it with pinecones and red ribbon," Darwin notes. "Make it fun and to suit your style and décor."

Darwin began her accessorizing with a bow. These are available for purchase, or, if you want to tackle it yourself, follow the steps, shown right, using a wired ribbon:



**4.** Finish accessorizing your wreath as you like, using stem balls, berries, synthetic materials, etc. Place these pieces around the wreath before attaching them so you can determine the perfect positioning. Note that when you're using the small stem balls – essentially Christmas balls, but with a handy stem attached for easy mounting – groups of three work well visually. You could also use your own favourite ornaments as long as they have a top that can be secured to the wreath. "The possibilities are endless, really. It's just about being creative," Darwin says.

**5.** If desired, finish the wreath with a little spray glitter and hang. Often one of the easiest ways to hang your wreath is with a wreath hanger which simply sits over the top of the door.

### TARRA'S TIP:

If you want a wreath that will last for years, forego the greenery in favour of wonderful branches, also readily available here in Victoria.

Darwin likes to use willow or witch hazel branches bent and wired around a wreath frame. Leave it natural or spray it with gold or silver spray (three coats works best, but follow manufacturer's instructions to allow the paint time to dry between coats).

Finish by wrapping with battery-operated white mini-lights (batteries mean no wires or plugs to accommodate) and you have a simple wreath that will look gorgeous for years to come.



**3A)** Pull out the amount of ribbon for the tail and twist.



**3B)** Pinching at the twist, make a loop, then twist again and pinch together the base of the loop and the twist at the top of the tail.



**3C)** Repeat until you have as many loops as you want, making sure you have an even number of loops for both sides of the bow.



**3D)** Adjust the loops until they sit as you like (this is where the wired ribbon works so well), then cut the ribbon, allowing enough material for the second tail. If you would like two more tails for an added layer, cut another piece of ribbon and pinch it as well at the centre of the bow.



**3E)** Using florist wire, secure the centre of the bow, leaving enough wire to attach the bow to the wreath. Snip ends to add a "V" detail to bow tails.

## FOR YOUR TABLE:

# A Seasonal Centrepiece

## DOWN TO WORK

**1.** As with the wreath, begin by deciding which materials you'll use for your centrepiece. Our expert, Tarra Darwin, from In Bloom Floral Boutique in the Saanich Centre, has selected several varieties of long-lasting cedar and some variegated holly. To this she will add some white roses, carnations or similar flowers for an elegant white-and-green look, but you could easily choose the perfect colour scheme to complement your décor.

**2.** Cut your oasis to fit your container, preferably something reasonably low as you don't want a centrepiece that will block the view of your guests. The actual container isn't particularly important as the greenery will cover most of it, but it must be watertight. Cut the oasis to fit (it should stand about one-quarter inch above the top of the container) and soak it well in a sink or bowl. It should be completely covered by water. Next, trim the top corners of your oasis on an angle. This will create a small channel for water to run down into the bottom of the container.

**3.** Insert plastic candle holders into the oasis, then secure in place with the strapping tape. Set the candles in the holders. Because the candles will be the tallest element in the arrangement, they go in first to give you an idea of the scale you're looking for, Darwin explains.

**4.** Now, begin inserting the base materials – the cedar – which will drape over the container. This creates a frame for you to fill in with other greenery and flowers. It's also important to clip a nice clean edge on the stems to make it easier to insert them into the oasis. Add some different greens for visual interest and colour, such as holly, and be sure to add enough so that you don't see the foam. "That's where fir comes in handy because it's really full – you don't need as much of it," Darwin says. As you're placing the greenery around the arrangement, turn it to ensure you're creating a balanced appearance.

**5.** Now it's time for your flowers. Try choosing some with longer stems and some with shorter stems to provide a balance between the wider base of the arrangement to the narrower top. Carnation, chrysanthemums and alstroemeria are all longer lasting flowers that do well in these kinds of arrangements. Alternatively, you could replace the flowers if they start to wilt after several days. Be careful as well to create a visually appealing balance between the shape and variety of flowers – don't have all carnations on one side and all mums on the other. Finish your arrangement with the addition of wired accessories such as the stem balls and, if desired, a dusting of glitter for a little sparkle.

Finally, check the container daily and be sure to maintain the water levels.

### FLORIST'S TIP:

If you're having trouble getting the flowers and accessories into the foam, close your eyes and feel for the oasis with your fingertip, then guide the stem into the foam.



Finished centrepiece in elegant white and green.

## MATERIALS

- Hand pruners
- Needlenose pliers
- Wire cutters
- Oasis
- Clean, watertight container
- Plastic florist candle holders
- Waterproof strapping tape
- Assorted greenery, berries, flowers and accessories
- Glitter (optional)



**2)** Trim oasis to fit container.



**3)** Use strapping tape to secure candle holders.



**4)** Insert base greens then layer other greens for texture and depth, flowers and accessories.

DISCLAIMER: Reno Zone is a regular monthly feature that is meant to inspire the creativity of our readers. Results may vary from individual to individual. This article is not meant to replace the advice or work of a professional tradesperson.