NATIVE PLANTS for the Garden

FULL CIRCLE: NATIVE PLANT WREATHS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

by Jennifer Jewell

It is nearly December. While first frost has not arrived as I write, it is threatening nightly. The air is crisp, the deciduous trees and shrubs are on the last run of their circle through the seasons – turning their autumnal colors, closing down their systems and pulling their energies into the deepest parts of themselves. Dried, fallen although many still colorful leaves drift across sidewalks and gardens. The garden looks sleepy and settled in the low light of early winter. We have all come full circle through another year of life, while not perhaps a perfect or perfectly smooth circle by any means, we have still once again come all the way back around.

It’s time to make wreaths and greens from the bounty of our gardens to celebrate the circle of the seasons.

Wreaths date back to ancient Greece and Rome when ring-shaped head pieces were made using fresh leaves, small fruits & flowers. The word wreath comes to us from the greek Diadema, “a thing bound around.” In the Christian tradition, evergreen wreath-making began well before the common era to symbolize perseverance through dark winter.

Wreaths and swags made from seasonal greens, bright berries, winter fruits, and sculptural cones have long been associated with the winter holidays - with brightening shortened days and long nights, with the universal hope for the return of the light, and symbolic wishes of prosperity for the coming fresh start of the new year.

We are not alone in loving the rich look and the iconic form of the wreath. According to Adrienne Edwards, with whom I will be leading a native plant wreath workshop for the Chico State Herbarium on December 7, 2013 (http://www.csuchico.edu/biol/Herb/workshops/Wreath_Workshop_12-7-13.pdf): “Wreaths have been created since ancient times to represent the virtues, harvests and cycles of many cultures and religions. The Greeks used oak leaves to symbolize wisdom. Hollies have been used in wreaths since at least the late Middle Ages to symbolize eternity and new life.”
through the *Seasons*

We native plant lovers and gardeners are particularly blessed with bounty when it comes to choices for natural seasonal trimmings. Your options are almost endless and to let your own creativity flow is half the fun. From the simple and serene, to the abundant and layered, from a small wreath at the base of a candle to large exterior front door or garden gate creations, your native plant garden can provide you with the beauty you need to celebrate the year coming full circle inside as well as out.

You can start with a traditional evergreen base made from a variety of evergreens: conifers — redwoods, cedars, firs, pines; or broadleaf evergreens such as Howard McMinn or Emerald Carpet Manzanita trimmings work well also. Just these materials all on their own shaped into a wreath make simple, sophisticated adornments, so you could easily stop right here.

Or, you can go the route of the full cornucopia of native plant delights and accent a large evergreen base to your heart’s content. Myriad cone sizes and forms from large sugar pine cones, to tiny little cones plucked from bare alder branches can be wired all around or at just one point (top, bottom, to one side) on your wreath. You can add bright red-twig dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) branches, or antler-like bare bleached Manzanita branches all around the wreath, or again just as accents at one point. You can add the texture, fragrance and color contrast of sprays of white sage, which even dry will remain fragrant for far longer than the current season. You can add wired acorns and glossy mahogany buckeyes, and you can brighten up any of the above with clusters of bright red toyon berries or white mistletoe.

The days may be short, they may even be cold and gray, but the gifts of the seasons come full circle when your native plants add beauty and cheer to the ringing out of this circled season and the heralding in of the coming one.

Simple Wreaths  (top) red-berried toyon,  (middle) Emerald Carpet Manzanita, (bottom) native California bay.