

MASTER GARDENER

Vacation houseplant care

By Heidi Kratsch

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

Keeping houseplants alive when you vacation during the holidays can be a big challenge. No one wants to come home to



University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

withered, leafless or even dead plants. One strategy to keep your plants moist while you're away is to slow down their metabolism so they don't use as much water. You can easily do this by lowering the temperature of your home to between 60 and 65 degrees and moving your plants away from direct sunlight. These strategies will help but are not sufficient to keep your plants from drying out if you will be away for more than a week. So, here are some tips for keeping your plants alive while you enjoy your vacation.

The day before you leave for your trip, give your plants a thorough soaking, allowing excess water to drain. Then do one or more of the following to increase humidity levels around your plants:

- » Move your plants to the bathroom. Place plants in the bathtub on a tray filled with pebbles and water. Close the bathroom door to keep humidity in, and keep the lights on. Even plants that require bright sunlight will survive for at least two weeks under these low-light conditions. When you return, you may observe weak spindly growth on your plants because of insufficient light. Just prune away the undesirable growth and place plants back in their normal location.

- » Bag your plants. Surround each individual plant with a plastic bag, preventing the bag from touching the leaves by using stakes. This slows water loss from leaves and minimizes evaporation of water from the soil surface. If you have many, or very large, plants group them together in a bright room on a piece of plastic or tarp. Cover the whole group with clear plastic, sealing the edges with tape or staples. One caveat: avoid direct sunlight on plants covered with clear plastic or they will suffer from heat damage. If plants are near a south- or west-facing window, use sheer curtains to provide partial shading, or use white-colored plastic as your plant cover. Under these conditions, most plants will survive for up to three or four weeks.

- » Use automatic watering devices. In my opinion, glass watering globes are the greatest invention since sliced bread. These little beauties hold enough water to last for at least two weeks and look lovely in your home. Larger plants may require additional globes. An older type of automatic watering device is the water-wick. Use cotton (not polyester) strips of fabric to wick water from an elevated bowl to the soil around the base of your plant.

- » Finally, if you will be gone longer than two weeks, consider asking a friend or neighbor to check on your plants every few days.

Heidi Kratsch is the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension horticulture specialist for western Nevada. She can be reached at 775-784-4848 or kratschh@unce.unr.edu.

INSIDE TODAY

Calendar of events.....	38
Cipher/word search.....	38
Comics/puzzles.....	2B, 4B
Community news.....	2B
Crossword.....	2B
Dear Abby.....	2B
Horoscope.....	4B
Movie times.....	3B
Television.....	3B

FOCUS ON: HOME & GARDEN



1 Foam cones are the ornament tree's base.



2 Brightly colored plastic ornament balls are the tree's embellishments.



3 Olivia Osborne spray paints a foam cone with gold paint.



4 Painted foam cones, ready for deployment.



5 Osborne hot-glues an ornament to the cone. Use a quarter-sized amount of glue, and hold the ornament until the glue sets.



6 A tree in progress.



7 A completed Christmas ornament tree. PHOTOS BY LAURA LONGERO/RGJ

CHRISTMAS CRAFTING



Ornament trees celebrate the holiday season

By Laura Longero
llongero@rgj.com

Christmas break is the perfect time to undertake a crafty project. But don't think kitschy children's crafts, think a sophisticated Martha Stewart-esque item, dreamed up by Aspen Leaf Interiors designer Olivia Osborne.

Osborne, who said she grew up in a really creative household, has done crafts for a long time.

"My grandmother was so creative she could almost trump Martha Stewart," Osborne said.

So, we got together the other blustery day at her stylish home to create ornament Christmas trees, a craft that is easy enough for older children to make — perhaps even younger children, if you help them with the hot glue gun.

The ingredients for this craft are styrofoam cones, plastic colored ball ornaments, spray paint, and hot glue and hot glue gun.

Step 1: Spray paint your cone. Do this outside, someplace where flying paint won't matter, or lay down some newspaper and



Designer Olivia Osborne, with Aspen Leaf Interiors in Truckee, poses with four ornament trees at her Reno home.

paint there.

The color you paint your cone should be one of the ornament colors you plan to use. Osborne used gold for her gold-and-bronze tree, and I used red paint for my red, gold, bronze and green tree.

Be careful not to use too

much paint. As we learned, too much paint melts the cone a little bit when you use the hot glue.

Step 2: Start applying the ornaments to the cone with hot glue, starting at the bottom. Plan out where you want to put the ornament

and apply your glue there. Osborne said to use a circle of hot glue about the size of a quarter. Place your ornament atop the glue and hold it there until it sets.

"Put them on in a pattern like a spiral," she said. "I like to start at the bottom and work up."

Step 3: Continue gluing ornaments onto the tree, going around the bottom and continuing up to the top. Osborne said she likes mixing the size of the ornament balls, and the colors.

Step 4: When you get to the top, using a pair of scissors, carefully cut a small hole into the top of the cone and fill it with hot glue. Place an ornament in the hole, upside down, using the hanger part of the bulb to fill the hole you cut.

Step 5: Place small or miniature balls in spots where you have holes and can see the cone, without going too crazy.

I used gold balls to fill holes, so they looked like ornaments on the tree, which was mostly built with larger balls.

"There's not really a science to it," she said.

Closing up the house for the holidays: a checklist

By Lisa A. Flam
Associated Press

The flights have been booked, the suitcases retrieved from the attic and your vacation itinerary has been set. But while your mind may be ready to wander to a faraway land, don't forget about home sweet home just yet.

Securing your home and making it look occupied while you're away on a winter vacation will help deter thieves. And some simple preparations can save you the anguish and expense of returning home to find damage if something like a dishwasher hose decides to fail in your absence.

"If you look at how long it takes compared to repairing the potential damage, it seems much easier to take the precautions than it does to make the repairs," said Richard

Stone, a University of Minnesota Extension educator in housing technology.

Here's a checklist for closing up the house properly before you go:

- » Daily check: Arrange for a friend or neighbor to check on the house at least once a day (and feed the fish or water the plants). Give that person a copy of your itinerary and contact numbers. Ask that they call the police if they see or hear anything out of the ordinary.

- » Mail/newspapers: Have the mail held, or ask a neighbor to take it in. The U.S. Postal Service will hold mail from three to 30 days. Sign up for this free service at usps.com, or pick up a form at the post office that can be given to your letter carrier, left in your mailbox or returned to your post office. Cancel newspaper de-

liveries, and ask your neighbor to take in any unexpected holiday packages, notices of delivery attempts that may be left on your door, or free publications tossed on the driveway.

"That's a sure sign that you're not there, when all that stuff starts accumulating at your house," said Ernie Long, the crime prevention coordinator for the Aventura Police Department in Florida and an instructor for the National Crime Prevention Council.

- » Snow removal: If you don't have a contract for regular snow removal, arrange for somebody to clear your driveway and sidewalk if there is a storm. The house will look occupied if the driveway is cleared, plus that allows any emergency crews closer access to your home. Students may want the job, but find out if they have their own equip-

ment or need access to yours.

- » Security: Lock all windows and doors and set your alarm if you have one. The police also might be able to check on your house daily. If your department has one, register with its "vacation watch" or "dark house" list.

"We will periodically go by and check your house to make sure everything is on the up and up," Long said. "Just about every police department offers some kind of vacation watch."

- » Lights: To make your house look lived in, put lights on timers to mimic your typical routine. Long said he'll set his living room timer to go on in the evening for a bit, and then he'll set a bedroom light to go on for an hour before his usual bedtime. Exterior motion lights are highly effective in

See CHECKLIST, Page 2B