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Tips for holiday decorating

By Elaine Gaston
For The Sun News

Saving time, money and sanity are what interior designers are touting this holiday season.

Some do-it-yourselfers will still go all out. Others will seek a simpler, less stressful and more inexpensive way to decorate, especially in these tough economic times - and will ultimately be creating more time to spend with family and friends.

That's what's most important, the design experts say.

"Why stress over the holidays?" asked Deborah Burnett, residential spokeswoman for the American Society of Interior Designers. "As we get older, our lives get more hectic. We don't have the time to do full-blown holiday decorating. It's time to start putting people first."

Ten national and local designers, including Burnett, shared their ideas and tips on holiday decorating this year:

Deborah Burnett | Instead of a traditional Christmas tree, use an existing large houseplant to trim for the holidays. Burnett decorates her 9-foot faux palm tree, grouping red berries around the base of the tree, draping strands of white lights around the palm, tying 10 to 15 small gold balls on with ribbon, and grouping five poinsettia plants around the base of the plant

Designer Mindy McVay of Pawleys Island | "When clients ask me to decorate their homes, I select ribbons and a few accent ornaments in colors that complement their decor. Most of my own ornaments are gold and silver with a few colored pieces, allowing me to change themes yearly. I also use oversized faux wreaths in windows in the dining room, den and kitchen with different but coordinating themes, and attach garland to drape the windows."

McVay said windows should either be bare or have shades that can easily be pulled out of the way to showcase the wreaths.

Kathy Wilson, editor of TheBudgetDecorator.com | "My favorite decorating tip is using things you already have and love to decorate. Pretty paper folded into fans, cherished cookie cutters hung on a ribbon, or snowflakes cut from white paper and hung en masse from the ceiling can make dramatic and beautiful holiday statements."

Lorrie Brown with MyDesignSecrets.com | "One of my favorite decorating tips for the holidays is to bring the outdoors in with live plants. Instead of using artificial garland or wreaths, I like to use rosemary Christmas trees in multiple locations throughout the house. Just pop the plastic container into a decorative pot and put a ribbon around it. If you want to take it a bit further, the rosemary trees can be decorated with popcorn and cranberries. My favorite way is to decorate them with a small set of battery-operated white lights. The idea is simple, the rosemary is wonderfully fragrant, and it can be planted outside when the holidays are over."

Designer Wayne Graffius of Myrtle Beach | Getting the whole family involved, especially the children, in decorating for the holidays can be fun and enriching, Graffius said. His favorite holiday decorating idea this year brings families together to create a piece that reflects a sense of place and is ideal for displaying over the fireplace. With help from his roommate's nieces and nephews, Graffius transformed a plain grapevine wreath into a holiday ornament in a teal blue and white color scheme. He used oversized starfish and seashells, three silk poinsettias, all hot-glued to the right side of the wreath, and a large bow at the bottom to finish the piece. To complete the vignette, Graffius filled two glass vases with pine cones and topped old plates with candles and hot-glued seashells around the candles in a layered effect, all of which he placed along a mantel top.

Designer Stacy Sanders of Granny's Florist of Conway | Don't be intimidated by using large, oversized ornaments on trees and wreaths, Sanders said. Oversized ornaments can make a bold statement and are eye-catching.

"It can go a long way and make a big impact," he said.

Designer Rhonda Daniels of Surfside Beach | "My favorite thing is to use all-natural items we have in the

Lowcountry," Daniels said. "We're blessed with so many wonderful things like magnolia, palm fronds, holly, pine and cedar." Daniels likes to display magnolia leaves, either in their natural state or spray-painted gold or silver, on china cabinet tops or laid out on the dining table.

"They maintain their freshness for quite some time, she said.

As a centerpiece, Daniels mixes natural materials, including the magnolia leaves, pine and pinecones, and places them in a large bowl on the dining table or coffee table. A pineapple in the center anchors the piece, and small Christmas balls are incorporated in the design as well.

Stager Renee Pratta with Renewed Rooms of Little River | Pratta enjoys adding shimmer during the holidays using metallic ornaments. She dresses her mantel in metallic ornaments she's collected over the years.

"If you don't have a lot of money, you can make bread-dough ornaments, paint and decorate them," Pratta said. "I did that one year, and my kids joined in. You spray them with shellac, and they'll last a couple of years.

Another inexpensive way to make metallic ornaments is to use decorative wrapping paper, cut out shapes, use tacky glue on one side and glue on poster or foam board for stability.

Designer George Fain of Conway | If you have a stairwell, drape it with pine garland embellished with ornaments and bows.

"I like to incorporate woody items you can find in your own yard and bring them into your home," Fain said. "It's what people did before you could buy artificial trees. Using natural materials gives your look a more traditional, antique feel."

If the thought of gathering pine and wiring it together to create a garland intimidates you, you can still get a natural look by using artificial garland but wiring in greenery from the yard, such as magnolia leaves and holly.

"You're doing that for pennies," Fain said. For the dining table, Fain said he enjoys filling a glass bowl with silver ornaments and snaking in a set of battery-operated Christmas lights. Set the bowl in a wreath and punctuate it with four round Christmas bows.

Lifestyle designer Susie Coelho, author of "Secrets of a Style Diva" | "Keeping it simple is my motto this year," Coelho wrote in an e-mail.

Coelho dressed a white tree with silver ornaments from her Grandin Road's Signature Collection, featuring mercury glass ornaments and Christmas trees.

"I love this simple mix of silver and white, and it's so elegant that it can work with any style whether contemporary or classic, so even if I want to add some color next year, I can use this as a base," Coelho said.

Coelho said she, too, is shooting for less stress this holiday season and more time spent with her loved ones.

"This year, I am keeping presents to a bare minimum, and we are going to spend all of that hectic last-minute shopping time doing fun things together."