

Decorations from the garden

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Happy Autumn! This is the time of year when we start spending most of our time indoors, but it's not too late to collect plant materials from outside to beautify our homes. Ask your grown-ups for permission and then head out to find materials to make a Thanksgiving centerpiece. You'll need a container to hold everything and probably some garden clippers or scissors. Bring a grown-up with you if you're not allowed to use clippers yet.

What you're looking for are interesting branches, pine cones, seed pods, grasses or crabapples that the birds haven't eaten yet. Be sure you have permission before you cut anything off a tree. Peer into large shrubs like lilacs to see if there are any old bird's nests, they're easy to see once the leaves have fallen and the birds don't need them anymore. You might even find pretty leaves still hanging onto tree limbs; some oak leaves hang around until spring. It may seem that everything you see is brown, but once you've collected a few things you'll see that there's a variety of shades. Keep on the lookout though, for gold, dark green, and burgundy plants and dried flowers. Don't expect everything to be perfect, being dried and shriveled makes things interesting. Since you may be collecting things you can't identify, be sure you don't eat any of it, even if it looks good enough to eat!

When you're done collecting, you can make your arrangement right away or set your materials aside until Thanksgiving. You can make your arrangement in a shallow basket or bowl, or assemble it right on the table. Ask your grown-ups if there are any extra apples or vegetables you can use, squash and tiny pumpkins also look really good in autumn centerpieces. Start by mounding the largest pieces (like apples and squash) on the bottom of your container or right on the table. Then take your pretty leaves, seed pods and other dried plants and poke them into the empty spaces all around. When that's all done, sprinkle your crabapples or dried berries over the top. You can also sprinkle on some whole nuts if there are extras in the kitchen. If you have some small pieces left that are too small to use, glue them onto index cards (the blank side) and make a name card for everyone who's coming to dinner. Put one name card at every place and your table will be beautifully decorated!