



Nature table: moss, fir cones and white cyclamen surround white candles set into glazed pots

Use hyacinths and hellebores, mistletoe and pink poinsettias to decorate your home this Christmas. Stylist Jacky Hobbs reveals the tricks of her trade

Let nature take over

By **Pattie Barron**



Another level: a stepladder is used to display pots of ornamental cabbages and tea lights

Photographs: **Clive Nichols**

GETTING Christmas decorations right is an art, and you would expect a stylist specialising in plants to excel at it. Jacky Hobbs does not disappoint. The look she favours at her home in Richmond, which she shares with her teenage daughters Lauren and Siena, is natural and at the same time enchanting.

"I love the garden, and look on Christmas decorations as my last gardening chance for the year," she says. "So I use nature as my base – green foliage and white flowers – then add a few floral layers: roses, maybe cyclamen or lilies, with frothy gypsophila. The pared-back interiors in my home make a brilliant blank canvas."

What makes her decorations special are the fine details. She says: "I like to create little scenes within the big picture, so when friends and family come in, they enjoy making discoveries around each corner. I use small metal garden tables throughout the house, dressing them with plants, pots and budding spring bulbs."

These small, charming touches are everywhere: a slate heart displays a chalked Noël and hangs on a door, dressed with mistletoe and a ribbon; sprigs of holly



are pushed into curtain tiebacks as well as into the antique French zinc pelmet in her bedroom; an old stepladder becomes a display case for several pots, in which they enjoy making discoveries around each corner. I use small metal garden tables throughout the house, dressing them with plants, pots and budding spring bulbs."

"I go to Nine Elms Flower Market at the start of December and buy a tray of hyacinths or hellebores, whatever catches my eye – I prefer outdoor plants to houseplants," says Hobbs. "Poinsettias are great value. They don't have to be red – look for subtler

pinks and ice greens – and use them as cut flowers, too, by snipping off the individual rosettes. They'll last through Christmas if you pass the cut stem through an open flame to seal the sap. You can use them tucked into napkin rings at the table, or anywhere you want to add a special touch."

Her Christmas dining table is an old wooden garden table, covered with a vintage French linen sheet. "It's easier to make a white cloth festive with seasonal flowers than to use a patterned one," says Hobbs. "Don't

have one big centrepiece: spread the weight down the table. I cheat and take the wreath from the door once guests are indoors and drop it around a candle in the centre: it's an easy way of taking the look through."

This year, her wreath is of lichen and mosses studded with white roses, wired on to a foam base. On either side silvery baking tins are planted with ivy

sprays trailing from velvety green moss while vintage tartlet tins, scattered down the length of the table, hold tea lights. At each place setting, a white cyclamen sits in a china cup.

Hobbs likes the grandeur of twin trees, dropped into massive vintage zinc planters, and says: "I prefer Nordman firs because the needles don't drop and they smell so good. My trick

Fireside glow: bringing fir sprays indoors creates a fragrant welcome

is to cut off the bottom boughs so they balance better, then cut up those boughs to use around the house. To decorate the tree, I don't use colour, because I want it to sparkle and shimmer with glass baubles. I also thread old chandelier drops on the boughs.

Simplicity works: Jacky Hobbs lights the candle in the wreath centrepiece

Sprays of gypsophila along the boughs make them snowy and I might lay pine cones along them, too. The effect I want is of a magical and natural frosted forest, so I don't use tinsel or garlands of any kind.

"It's easy to go over the top with

Christmas decorations. The key is to keep it simple and pretty, with a continuous thread throughout. Guests need to see what's there: if you have too much going on, it all merges into one and spoils the effect."

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From left: clear fairy lights trail around the top of the kitchen cupboards; a slate heart hangs on a door and carries a festive chalked message; a sprig of holly is tucked into a curtain tieback to provide a seasonal contrast

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