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Why are Christmas colors red and green?

Many people may not get in the holiday spirit without decorations and all the trimmings. Chances are strong that if you have containers full of items just waiting to see the light of day again this holiday season, those items are red or green or some combination thereof.

Red and green have become the traditional colors of Christmas, just as blue and white symbolizes Chanukah. But how did this color palette come to evolve?

Just like many traditions of Christmas, the red and green scheme has origins that pre-date the Christian celebration. Christmas has borrowed from many of the customs of winter solstice celebrations of ancient peoples, including the Celts. Ancient Celtic people revered holly plants, believing they brought beauty and good fortune in the middle of winter — a time when the landscape is normally bleak and holly plants thrive and stand out. Celts



would regularly bring in sprigs of holly and decorate their homes with the plants, which feature shiny, serrated leaves and bright, red berries, as a way to guarantee a prosperous new year. Holly also came to be associated with the crown of thorns Jesus Christ was forced to wear during his crucifixion.

The custom of using red and green continued into the 14th century. Dr. Spike Bucklow, a research scientist at the University of Cambridge, says red and green also were used to paint medieval rood screens,

which were partitions installed in churches to separate the congregation from the priest and altar. Dr. Bucklow notes that Victorians also extended the association of these colors as a physical boundary to another boundary: the marking of the end of the old year and the beginning of a new one at Christmastime.

While red and green had associations with Christmas in early times through holly and other sources, the connection was perhaps best solidified thanks to a man named Haddon Sundblom. Sundblom was an artist commissioned in 1931 by the Coca-Cola company to create an image of Santa Claus for the company's upcoming holiday ads. Until this point, versions of Santa were rarely consistent, with his clothing vacillating between green, blue and red. He also wasn't the plump, jolly fellow associated with Christmas as we know him today, but rather thin and elf-like. Sundblom portrayed him as a chubby man wearing red robes, likely as a nod to Coca-Cola's own red logo, even though the company denies the connection. Santa was featured in front of a green background. The ads proved popular and Sundblom's Santa became the preferred depiction. Santa's red robes perfectly complemented the green background and other green components of the holiday, such as Christmas trees and holly, that already had been solidified as Christmas imagery.

Color plays a strong role in creating Christmas nostalgia. Red and green are put on vivid display throughout the season.

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Stay safe when stringing holiday lights

Lighting displays are one of the many things that help make the holiday season a special time of year. Often awe-inspiring, holiday lighting displays present a perfect opportunity for communities and individuals to showcase their festive sides.

Safety should always be a priority when stringing holiday lights both inside and outside a home. Lighting displays strung on home exteriors also can pose safety risks if homeowners do not exercise caution. Fortunately, various strategies can help homeowners safely decorate their homes' interiors and exteriors this holiday season.

- Choose a fresh tree. The NFPA recommends celebrants who prefer natural Christmas trees choose ones with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Dry trees are more likely to catch fire than freshly cut trees. Adding water to the tree stand each day will keep trees fresher longer. When placing the tree, avoid placing it too close to heat sources, making sure it is at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents, or lights.

- Check all lights before

stringing them. All lights, including those going on trees inside a home and those being strung outside, should be inspected prior to being strung. Look for any worn or broken cords and replace any defected lights.

- Employ the buddy system. When stringing lights, always work with at least one other person. This makes it safe for homeowners who must climb ladders to string lights on especially tall trees and/or on their home exteriors.

- Avoid working in inclement weather. The weather during the holiday season can sometimes be unpleasant or unpredictable. Check the forecast before stringing exterior lights to ensure Mother Nature won't pose a threat. Avoid hanging lights if the forecast predicts wet, icy or windy conditions that can make ladders unstable.

- Turn lights off when going to bed and/or leaving the house. Interior and exterior holiday lights should not be left on when no one is home or everyone inside is sleeping. If left on overnight or when no one is home, lights may contribute to fires that damage homes and may even

prove fatal.

Holiday lighting displays help make this time of year special. Following some simple safety procedures when decorating with lights can ensure everyone enjoys a safe and happy holiday season. • Avoid working in inclement weather. The weather during the holiday season can sometimes be unpleasant or unpredictable. Check the forecast before stringing exterior lights to ensure Mother Nature won't pose a threat. Avoid hanging lights if the forecast predicts wet, icy or windy conditions that can make ladders unstable.

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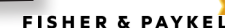


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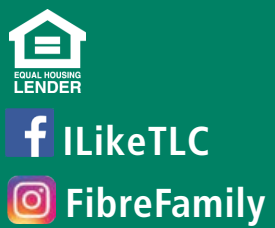
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Design ideas to give your home a farmhouse feel

Farmhouse style homes are having a moment. A 2020 survey from Homes.com asked more than 5,000 adults across the United States about their favorite house style from a list that included bohemian craftsman, mid-century modern ranch, French chateau, and Tudor, among others. Modern farmhouse was the runaway winner, as participants in 42 of the 50 states indicated this simple, cozy style was their favorite.

Home renovation projects can help homeowners put their own unique stamp on their homes, and such projects can be both aesthetic and functional in nature. The following are some farmhouse design elements homeowners can consider as they look to transform their home interiors with this popular style in mind.

- Exposed beams: Exposed beams instantly evoke images of a farmhouse. The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that this rustic renovation project can utilize real wood or faux beams that look like the real thing. Decorative beams that have nothing to do with a home's structural integrity can be installed by skilled do-it-yourselfers. However, even faux beams are heavy, and BobVila.com recommends homeowners have an engineer assess their existing structure prior to installation.
- Distressed wood finishes:



Distressing is designed to make something look less than perfect. Distressed wood finishes can be found throughout many farmhouse style homes. Furniture and picture frames can provide the distressed look farmhouse fans are looking for. This is a relatively inexpensive project that many homeowners can tackle on their own after watching some online tutorials that recommend the right tools and techniques to get the job done right.

- Kitchen sink: Many components combine to create a truly classic farmhouse kitchen. But perhaps no component is more essential than the classic farmhouse sink. The renovation experts at HGTV note that a classic farmhouse sink features a deep, wide ba-

sin. Farmhouse sinks are large enough to handle all the dishes that come after a big family meal. Old-fashioned porcelain sinks are worth consideration by homeowners who want their kitchen sinks to evoke a traditional farmhouse feel.

- Countertops: HGTV recommends butcher block countertops for homeowners who favor European farmhouse style. Homeowners overhauling their kitchens to create a farmhouse feel should consider installing a large island with a walnut butcher block countertop for an authentic farmhouse feel.

Farmhouse style homes are wildly popular. Some simple renovations can help homeowners with a fondness for farmhouse style bring this classic look into their homes.



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Tips to keep your tree fresh this holiday season

Christmas trees are often the pièce de résistance of holiday decor. Few things draw the attention of holiday guests quite like an awe-inspiring Christmas tree, especially when that tree maintains its fresh, healthy sheen throughout December.

Many families purchase fresh trees over Thanksgiving weekend or during the first weekend of December. Though the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day may seem like a long time to keep a tree looking great, there are a handful of ways for holiday celebrants to help their trees maintain that undeniable appeal for the long haul.

- Pick the right tree. Choosing the right tree is one of the simplest ways to keep a tree looking good throughout the holiday season. A freshly cut tree that buyers choose and cut down themselves or have cut down can reassure them that the tree is likely to stay strong throughout December. Trees

purchased from a tree lot may have been cut down long before they made it to the lot, which can make it harder to keep them looking good until Christmas Day.

- Cut an inch off the base of any tree that is not freshly cut. MSU Extension at Michigan State University notes that all Christmas trees are conifers, which means they have resin canals in their trunks. Once a tree is cut, the resin can block the pores and make it harder for the tree to take in water. Cutting an inch off the base of a tree that was not freshly cut just before putting it in the stand can help ensure it gets the water it needs to stay healthy and firm. MSU Extension notes that this approach should be taken with any tree that was not cut within six to eight hours of being put in a stand.

- Replenish the water supply every day. Fresh tree veterans recognize that Christmas trees can be very thirsty, especially within the

first week or so of being cut and brought home. Fill the stand with water each morning and, if necessary, refill it each night before going to bed. The more water a tree gets and drinks, the more likely it is that the tree will look healthy all the way to Christmas Day. MSU Extension notes that many decorative or antique tree stands do not hold much water, so anyone with such a stand may need to replenish the water supply more than once or twice per day.

- Keep the tree away from a heat source. For safety's sake, trees should be kept away from heating vents, fireplaces and space heaters. But keeping trees away from such heat sources, and ensuring they are not spending the daytime in direct sunlight, also decreases the chances they will dry out before Christmas Day.

A handful of simple strategies can help holiday celebrants keep their Christmas trees looking good throughout the month of December.



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From left to right, Jordan Thompson, Keegan Hagerty, Rusty Robertson, Cody Folkema and the baby is our grandson, Frederick Folkema.

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Must-haves to achieve a holiday wonderland

The end of the year marks a period of heightened festivity. Come the holiday season, homes and businesses are decorated and everyone seems to have an extra spring in their step. The sight of snowflakes, candy canes, evergreen wreaths, and Christmas trees can elicit nostalgia for happy holidays of the past, as well as excitement for what is yet to come. When it comes to decorating for the holidays, there are certain items that set the scene.

- Christmas trees: Germany is credited with starting the modern Christmas tree tradition. It dates back to the 16th century when devout Christians brought trees into their homes and decorated them. German settlers brought Christmas tree traditions to America upon their arrival in Pennsylvania in the 19th century.
- Mistletoe: Mistletoe is known as the “kissing plant”

and it is customary for couples to kiss while standing beneath the plant, typically hung in doorways and arches. Mistletoe was once hung to drive off evil spirits and ensure fertility. Kissing under the mistletoe was first found associated with the Greek festival of Saturnalia and later with primitive marriage rites.

- Lights: Lights are commonly seen during the holiday season. The custom of having holiday lights dates back to when Christmas trees were decorated with candles, which symbolized Christ being the light of the world. These traditions evolved from pagan rituals that



- would celebrate the return of light of the sun as the days grow longer after the winter solstice.
- Yule log: Many families burn a yule log in the fireplace and watch it burn while listening to Christmas carols. The familiar custom of burning the log dates back to solstice celebrations and the tradition of bonfires. The Christmas tradition called for burning a portion of the log each evening until Twelfth Night, also known as the Epiphany, which takes place on January 6.
 - Poinsettias: Poinsettias are a tropical plant that originated in Mexico. Joel

Roberts Poinsett was the first Ambassador from the United States to Mexico. He became enamored with the plants, and brought them back to his native South Carolina. An old Mexican legend suggests a poor girl had nothing to offer baby Jesus at Christmas Eve services, so she picked a handful of weeds and put them at the bottom of the nativity scene. These weeds burst into bright red flowers and became known as “Flores de Noche Buena,” or “Flowers of the Holy Night.” Holiday decorations borrow traditions from all over the world to help establish a festive wonderland.

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Must-have features in your bathroom remodel

Veteran homeowners recognize the value of remodeling their kitchens and bathrooms. Kitchens and baths tend to appear dated more quickly than other spaces, such as living rooms and bedrooms, which can always be revamped with some fresh paint and new furnishings.

The home improvement pricing resource Home Guide indicates an average bathroom remodel costs anywhere from \$5,500 to \$15,000 depending on the size and scope of the renovation. However, a bath redo can increase a home's resale value and can return as much as 68 percent of homeowners' investments. As homeowners plan their bathroom renovations, it's a good time to consider improvements that will improve function and add design appeal for years to come.

- **Floating vanity:** Add an airy feeling to the room by creating space between the vanity and the floor. A floating vanity can be a counter with a vessel sink or even have cabinets, as long as the vanity doesn't extend to the floor.

- **Freestanding traditional sink or tub:** There's something elegant about a freestanding tub or pedestal sink. Such features can lend a classic vibe to a space. However, freestanding fixtures also come in modern or eclectic forms, so there are options for any design style.

- **Frameless showers:** Switch to a walk-in shower option, which improves aesthetics and makes it easier to "age in place" in a home. Pair that frameless shower with clear glass shower doors so sightline in the space remains unencumbered.

- **Natural textures:** Create a calm and serene sanctuary in the bathroom with light, natural hues and materials. Nature-inspired colors on tiles, walls and vanities can add to the spa vibe.

- **Dual sinks and vanities:** With a double vanity, two people can share the space and easily use the bathroom without getting in each other's way. One vanity with two sinks works, but homeowners can create

even more personal space by dividing vanities and mirrors.

- **Small textured tile on shower floors:** Small textures are appealing and add safety. The added texture and grouting will keep feet from slipping on wet floors. Also, opt for mold-resistant grout to make cleanup even easier.
- **Special shower heads:** Invest in shower heads that can run the gamut from creating steam showers to rainfall effects. Some showers will have multiple shower jets to offer an invigorating experience.
- **Improve drainage:** Increase the diameter of the drain pipe in the bathroom from the standard to a two-inch drain pipe. This will reduce the risk of clogs and overflow leaks.
- **Install a window:** Natural



light and air flow can reduce the risk for mold and mildew growth, and windows add some aesthetic appeal to a space. Just be sure to choose frosted privacy glass. Additional considerations for a bath remodel include heated floors, well-placed and attractive storage options and a toilet enclosure (water closet) for added privacy. These and other bathroom renovation ideas can add value and improve the appeal of the room.

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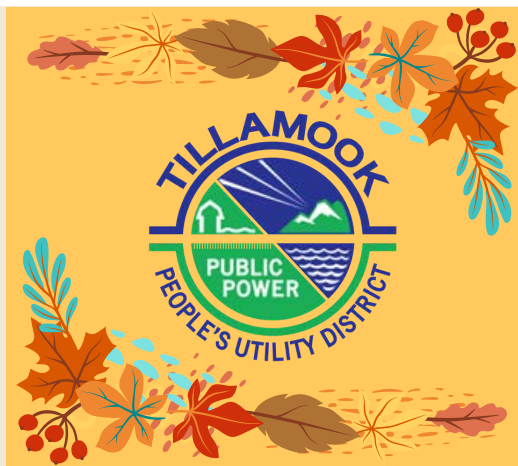
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