

Tale from the Garden!

Deck the halls with boughs of holly, Fa la la la la, la la la la
'Tis the season to be jolly, Fa la la la la, la la la la
Don we now our gay apparel, Fa la la la la, la la la la
Troll the ancient Yuletide carol, Fa la la la la, la la la la

Set the scene for your Christmas feast with rich pickings from the garden! Even those of us who think Christmas seems to come around earlier & earlier each year (& it certainly did start early this year for many who wanted to be cheered up after the difficult months which have gone before!), we've put our trees up & are ready to finish decorating the house for Christmas Day.

So this year, how about giving the tinsel a miss & going organic instead, spurning the silvery spangles & going a bundle on natural greenery? You can produce something wonderfully medieval with holly & ivy, a sprig or two of mistletoe & strips of ribbon. Table decorations in particular, look opulent if they consist of nothing more than a river of pine cones, mixed nuts & sultanas snaking down the centre on a runner made from hessian. Henry VIII would feel at home with this kind of display & he didn't stint himself when it came to spectacle. Sprigs of holly & ivy can be pushed into the mixture along with clippings from a Leyland Cypress (*Leylandii*) hedge. Other conifers can be plundered & church candles can be stood among the display. They are sturdy & high enough above the decorations below to be safely lit.



And wondering what to do with the rest of your oranges left over from making your Christingle? Pomanders can be made by taking an orange, fastening ribbon around it in a quartering pattern & studding the rind that remains visible with cloves. Just push their stalks into the orange skin (pack them close together) where they will stay firm. Such decorations are gorgeously fragrant & will last for months – pop them in your wardrobe or the drawer where you keep your socks & they'll act as air fresheners. Now you won't get that kind of effect from your average Christmas Bauble!

Derived from the French term *pomme d'ambre*, which means 'apple of ambergris,' a pomander is essentially a ball assembled from various fragrant herbs. Others take the phrase to mean "apple of amber" or "golden apple," as in the fragrant citrus fruits exchanged during holidays for good luck. Throughout history, the importance of scent has never been denied. Mystical & powerful, scent was an offering, a force of attraction & a curse.

You just have to remember the gifts of the Wise Men at the Birth of Jesus Christ to realise the significance of the senses at this time. The three gifts had a spiritual meaning: **gold** as a symbol of kingship on earth, **frankincense** (an incense) as a symbol of deity, and **myrrh** (an embalming oil) as a symbol of death. Sometimes this is described more generally as **gold** symbolizing virtue, **frankincense** symbolizing prayer, and **myrrh** symbolizing suffering.

The pomander became popular during the Middle Ages when the black death and other ailments ran rampant. Sanitation during the era was lamentably lacking. The streets and even some homes were strewn with filth, bodily fluids and the discarded remnants of past meals. People thought that the cause of their problems lay in the resulting stench lingering about the city. The belief went that the pleasant scent of a pomander could repel the disease in the air. A pomander could be worn around the neck or waist. Many women attached them to their girdles. Both men and women wore pomanders, most of

whom hailed from the elite classes of society. Queen Elizabeth I is frequently depicted wearing one, as are other nobles and notables of the day. People took great pride in their pomanders. Simple pomanders were made of wood, while the most stunning examples were worked in silver or gold, studded with precious stones, and etched with intricate designs. Some pomanders were divided into sections, similar to an orange, into which its wearer would place several different scents. The scent of a pomander is meant to be both appealing and soothing, which is why pomanders are now considered to be among the earliest forms of aromatherapy.

As time wore on, the pomander began to take on the “golden apple” interpretation. By the 18th century, a pomander was more often than not an orange studded with cloves and other spices. These made for popular gifts during Christmas and New Year.

So have a go & the end result will be a ball bang full of the wonderful scent of Christmas!

