



Seasonal touches to inspire you from Halloween to Thanksgiving

When my children were small, we celebrated Halloween in every possible way: wearing elaborate costumes, buying a variety of pumpkins and decking out the house with spider webs, real and plastic jack o' lanterns and the kids' handmade decorations. Trick or treat was a huge neighborhood event, and the collection of candy was enormous.

Now that my children are older and we are a little more independent I can admit: I don't really like Halloween. I don't enjoy dressing up, being scared silly or getting hyped up on sugar, and I have never really appreciated Halloween decorations. Now I do less for the specific holiday, and more for the season that begins with the start of fall and takes us through Thanksgiving's feast. Before the holiday rush begins, now is the perfect time to start to make small changes and add seasonal elements to your home.

Your front yard and entry area can be embellished with cornstalks, pumpkins, and bales of hay, which may be gathered locally or purchased at fruit stands or markets. Scarecrows and potted mums in all the fall colors will add some interest to your yard, as well. An old rake simply propped up against the house gives a nod to the season. Welcome your guests and cheer your neighbors with some of these inexpensive and colorful outdoor touches.

Collect gourds and pumpkins of different colors and sizes and distribute them around your home. The front porch, the entry area, a corner bench, or the living room bookshelves can all be enhanced with a single pumpkin or an assortment of small gourds, which may later be rounded up and displayed on your dining table as a centerpiece for Thanksgiving.

Fill your favorite ceramic or wooden bowl with an assortment of Indian corn, pinecones, persimmons and cinnamon sticks for a splash of seasonal color in the kitchen or family room. Pull out some cozy blankets in warm fall colors and throw them over the back of the couch, and hang a plaid or woolen scarf on the coat rack. Stack some firewood next to the woodstove, so you'll be ready for the cold evenings. Store your kindling in a large basket or ceramic cylinder, with some pinecones or evergreen tucked in for a lovely hearth arrangement.

Take out all your candleholders to add additional warmth and color to the cooler fall nights. Group your candlesticks by material: wood, brass, silver or metal should be displayed together, for example. When choosing candles, consider earth colors like tans, yellows, oranges and purples (we will deepen them later in the season). Distribute the

candles throughout the house, not only to add a touch of color, but also for easy illumination when you lose electricity on a windy evening.

Add extra pillows and blankets for warmth and comfort. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, there are many ways to add deeper colors and heavier fabrics to your interiors; for example, tablecloths, throw pillows, rugs, comforters and duvet covers can all be changed out for the season.

For an inexpensive and beautiful celebration, consider using natural materials when setting a fall table. Layer the surface with a tablecloth, runner or placemats in earth colors. If you have white plates, they can be mixed and matched with other pieces in deeper colors, and accessorized with fall-colored cloth napkins or drinking glasses, for example. Taper or pillar candles may be run down the center of the table in varied heights. Pressed or dried fall leaves can then be scattered down the tabletop, and interspersed with small pumpkins and gourds. Place cards tied to votive candles with a raffia ribbon, or a dried leaf labeled with a gold or black permanent marker and placed on the plate, or tucked into a napkin tied with a generous raffia bow all make a simple and welcoming statement.

Celebrate nature by bringing more of her bounty into your home. We are fortunate to live in a place where a walk through the surrounding area can yield beautiful spots of color for us to enjoy. The colors are beginning to change, and small branches of dogwood, liquid amber, burning bush, birch or rosehips can be clipped and placed in a vase to bring the brilliant fall colors inside.

This year I think I may forgo the orange plastic pumpkins, white ghosts and black witch hats all together, and slowly add the simple and natural fall accessories that I enjoy so much more. Some advice for ‘no cost decorating’: simply take what you have, and make some time to use it in different and interesting ways. May you enjoy the beauty of the fall in Calaveras County.

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