

Winter is Coming is Here

By Andi Peterson Brown

Winter is upon us, and there is no better time than now to spend a few hours preparing your home for continued cold and wet weather. In fact, now that we have a few storms under our belt, it's a logical time to inspect and see what is and isn't working on our properties. These easy tips can prevent future costly repairs, lower your utility bills, and ultimately protect your largest investment.

- Clean your gutters. It's so easy and yet so hard. But failing to clean your gutters will cause long term water damage to your siding, roofing, and wood trim.
- Inspect your roof and flashing. Been some time since anyone's been up there? For minimal cost, a roofer can inspect, diagnose, and perform basic repairs.
- Turn off or greatly reduce landscape irrigation. With our automated systems and in-ground drip systems, it's easy to forget about.
- Extend downspouts. Water should drain a few feet away from your foundation, not flow right onto it.
- Inspect your heating system. For minimal cost, and HVAC technician can tune up, clean, and perform basic repairs to ensure your system is running at maximum efficiency.
- Reverse your ceiling fans to push warm air down.
- Caulk around windows and doors. And those foam and fabric front door draft stoppers—yes, those, the ones on late night infomercials for twelve bucks—they work wonders.



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Stylish Solutions

Tie up Your Holiday Decorating With Decorative Pine Cone Garlands

By Ann McDonald



Photos provided

Merry, merry! December is always a magical time of year, but oh so busy. This month I wanted to share some helpful tips for your holiday home that are perfectly easy to implement last minute.

If you are running a tad behind on your decorating, go natural. I love the strong sentiment for décor inspired by nature. The simplest way to embrace the look is with pine cones, simple twigs and sticks. It may sound fundamental, but let me share how these three simple items can be used in your home and still look like you made an effort and planned.

A reminder about design: sometimes less is more. I love lavish to be sure, but the repeat of a simple element can bring a strong sense of design to any space. No apologies if you are overbooked this season and need to go this route. It's your home and your space. Beauty is in your eye.

The Pine Cone Garland:

It's always nice in raw state, but if you have three hours to give to actual labor and about 24 hours overall (paint drying) to give to the process, this simple craft project (note: I am not a crafter by nature, so if I can do this, you can too)

can have a huge impact on your home. Go overboard with a simple element and the strong design statement will make people think you planned this look from the midsummer. You will have garland for miles, some with lights, as well as arrangements for bowls, book shelves and coffee tables

How: We are dipping the bottom half of the pine cone in paint, potentially adding some flocking on the tips where painted and using these as elements everywhere. These are easy to source on your morning walk in Lamorinda, or at the local hardware store or craft store. If you gather them, make certain to soap and soak, so uninvited critters aren't part of your celebration!

I am loving the all-white look this year, but you can substitute any color that works in your home. We did one home in Reno this season in a deep red wine. It looks incredible! This is an easy and elegant approach. I like to use chalk paint due to the thick, matte look, paint can size (no transfer of paint needed) and coverage (no double dipping).

Dip your washed and dried pine cones into the paint about half way up. Let them hang to dry, rolling on newspaper to get any drips out from the center section. Apply a thin coat of spray sealer if you think you may use them next year, so paint doesn't end up all over your storage boxes.

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