

“Help me decorate my Christmas tree like a pro!”

Our expert “elves” share the easy ways to make *your* tree even more magical!

1 Make an impact!

Look right!

“Since most of us are right-handed, we tend to focus on the right side of the tree—that’s the side where you should put your flashiest, prettiest ornaments,” says decorating expert Ellen Stimson. “Place them about eye level.” Where to put ornaments you’re *not* so in love with? “I cluster those deeper inside the tree right near the trunk, so they’re not on full display, but they still give you pops of color.”



Keep pets (and kids!) safe!

Anchor the tree to a wall (use a hook and invisible wire) to prevent it from toppling if a pet or child pulls on it. Also: Place unbreakable paper, felt and plastic ornaments on the bottom third of the tree. Avoid tinsel, which can block airways if swallowed, and artificial snow, which can be toxic.

2 Beautify fast!

Share handmade memories!

Hanging homemade ornaments, from paper snowflakes to popcorn garlands, is an easy way to make your tree distinctively yours. Or start this fun tradition: “Gather the kids and grandkids and have everyone pick a favorite photo,” suggests decorating expert Bob Richter. “Print out the photos, put them into cardboard frames you can decorate with festive wrapping paper, and trim them on the tree using string. When family visits, let them choose a picture to go home with!”

Create vintage charm!

“During the lean years of WWII, people used whatever they had on hand to decorate their trees,” reveals Richter. “For example, you can easily give your tree gorgeous vintage charm by hanging cookie cutters with gingham, red or green ribbon—just choose a single color of ribbon to unify the look and tie everything together.” And scraps of vintage-style wrapping paper make stunning ornaments when glued to the tops of Mason jars, then popped back into their rings—which look like shiny frames!



Be imaginative!

“Think outside the ornament!” urges design expert Rachel Hollis.

“Pick up pretty feathers at any craft store and stick them into the tree branches here and there, or tie grosgrain ribbons into big bows and place at the end of branches.” Go outside and collect some holly and greenery, recommends Stimson. “Tie them together with a piece of twine for a rustic look or, say, velvet or satin ribbons that coordinate with your ornaments, and hang your ‘tree bouquets’ upside down to fill up any bare spots with pops of green!”

Make an aromatic orange garland!

“This gorgeous garland is the perfect thing to make with the kids and grandkids on a chilly day,” says Stimson. Preheat the oven to 150°F. Cut several oranges into quarter-inch slices, place them on a rack over a cookie sheet to catch drips and bake five hours to dry out the orange slices. Let cool. Using a fat upholstery needle, thread a four-foot long string of twine through the orange slices, alternating them with bay leaves and tying cinnamon sticks horizontally in between. Make each garland four feet long and use two strands for every vertical foot of tree.



—Kristina Mastrocola

Light it from within!

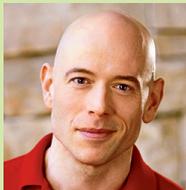
Start at the bottom of the tree and weave the strings in and out, going deep toward the trunk of the tree, then out again toward the front of the branches to give the tree a “lit from within” depth. Stimson’s ideal number of tree twinklers? “I recommend 200 lights per vertical foot—and use strings with a few burned out bulbs in *back* of your tree to give it a full effect.”



Our expert panel



Ellen Stimson, author of *An Old-Fashioned Christmas*, *Mud Season* and *Good Grief!*, is a renowned Vermont hostess. Visit her at EllenStimson.com.



Bob Richter, author of *A Very Vintage Christmas*, has been featured in *The New York Times*, and on FOX, CBS, ABC and HGTV. As “The Designer” of the PBS series, *Market Warriors*, Bob uses his expertise to strike deals at flea markets all over the country.



Rachel Hollis, author of *Upscale Downhome: Family Recipes*, *All Gussied Up*, is the founder of the lifestyle website “The Chic Site” (TheChicSite.com), which reaches more than 600,000 users a month.