



Christmas Greens

YULETIDE preparations, in olden days, presented no great problem. The lord of the manor sent his serving-men out into the woods to hew down branches of evergreen and holly and mistletoe. They nailed them up in the feasting-hall, strewed fresh rushes on the floor, and everything was ready.

Nowadays the problem isn't so easily solved. We have a bigger population, largely unorganized, and almost wholly built on an individualistic basis. No more great feasts in manorial halls; one-family gatherings in separate homes are the rule now. Instead of mass gatherings of decorations in the almost limitless forest, we have individual forays in the family auto, or even more frequently simply an excursion no farther than the corner store to buy our Christmas wreaths and garlands over a prosaic counter.

Therein lies the danger to our already perilously diminished woodlands. The unknown ultimate suppliers of holiday greenery for the market are all too frequently irresponsible persons who go out with trucks, to raid land that is not their own, and who make their collections in disregard both of the proper owner's rights and of the mischief they may be doing to the forests and the land, regarded as long-time national assets. It is therefore wise to make your purchases with this situation in mind.

Two items should be on everybody's boycott list: native holly and ground pine. So serious has the stripping of Eastern and Southern woods of native American holly become that in some states it is a jailable offense to be caught with holly branches, unless you can prove that you cut them with the owner's consent, or that they are from your own land. Better buy the greener-leaved, brighter-berried European holly, now

grown in this country especially for the Yule market.

Ground pine receives less legal protection than holly, though it really merits more, because it is often the only ground cover that exists on the loose, sandy, easily erodible soils that form the forest floor in many of our conifer woodlands. The best thing to do about ground-pine wreaths is to let them lie unbought, and get something else. There are plenty of quite acceptable substitutes that cost less and do not dry out so quickly.

There are at least two kinds of Christmas greens that as yet have no particular objections to meet from the conservation point of view: mountain laurel and mistletoe. Mountain laurel is so abundant as to be considered a weed shrub in many places, and mistletoe is a parasite on trees, actually doing them harm. Foresters, although they are as romantic as the next fellow, would nevertheless have no regrets if mistletoe were cut down to a small fraction of its present abundance.

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BIOLOGY

Sponge-Killing Epidemic Ends in Florida-Bahamas

THE deadly epidemic that was raging in the sponge beds of Florida and Bahamas waters last spring has died out—but, unfortunately, so have most of the sponges. Dr. Paul S. Galtsoff, biologist of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service who is back in Washington after a comprehensive survey of the sponge-producing areas, reports that the disease, before it abated, killed off about 75% of the commoner grades of sponges and nearly 90% of the finer kinds.

The industry is flat on its back until a new crop of sponges can grow, and that is a slow process, requiring several years. In the meantime, artificial sponges made of a cellulose compound are making heavy inroads into the market once held by natural sponges, and it is a question whether the latter will ever be able to recapture the lost sales territory.

The sponge-killing disease was caused by a fungus, that spread like wildfire through the warm waters where sponges grow. Nothing could be done against it, and its disappearance has been as unaccountable as its sudden outbreak was some months ago. It is hoped that the surviving sponges, hope of a new crop, represent resistant or immune strains that will found new and hardier races of sponges, but there is not real assurance that this is true.

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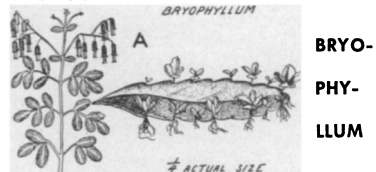
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