

Deck THE halls

It's time to unleash your inner creative and transform your home for the festive season. Alexandra Richards shares some ideas

Every year, we face the conundrum: how soon is too soon? In the UK we are greeted by jolly St Nicks with alarming regularity from September onwards, I don't think anyone would argue with me when I say that is definitely too soon. Having said that, my overriding feeling is to do whatever makes you happy; Christmas is a shining beacon of light and excitement in what can be a rather soggy and bleak time of year. Perhaps save the tree – and the consequent vacuuming – until closer to Christmas, but start slowly adorning your house for the festivities before then. Bringing the box of Christmas decorations down from the attic is a ritual unto itself, and the annual revisiting of homemade treasures is all part of the fun.

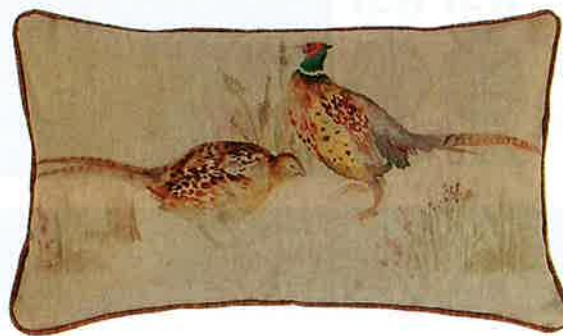
Why not limit the amount of decorations this year in favour of items which can last throughout the winter, into the sometimes anticlimactic days after New Year? Rather than having to take down all of the decorations after the big day, keep a few



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Above: Oka, Froxfield, 01488 684250, okadirect.com **Below left:** Game birds cushion, £41.50, The Painted Door, Berwick St Leonard, 01747 820620, thepainteddoor.co.uk **Below right:** Throws, from £45 to £67.99, The Beehive, Devizes, 01380 729 720, thebeehivelifestyle.com



on display to continue the magic. Items such as pillar candles, piles of rugs on the arm of a sofa, and softer, lower-wattage bulbs in standard lamps are all cosy Christmas touches that won't adhere to the old adage of bad luck after Twelfth Night.

Smell is one of our strongest and most evocative senses, so use this to your advantage. Candles and oil diffusers in scents such as cinnamon, frankincense, pine or ginger will bring a warming, festive feel to even the most sparingly decorated home. (It's also a great excuse to have

mulled wine and mince pies on the go pretty constantly, too).

Enhance your existing decoration collection by foraging for holly and ivy from trees and hedgerows, to bring a natural, Scandinavian-inspired look to your home. Stripped wooden decorations and splashes of red textiles, such as throws and cushions, will add to the scheme, and these can once again be kept on show after the festivities.

My favourite types of trees are the ones adorned with homemade creations, from wonky angels to tin foil stars – these seem to be more in the spirit of Christmas than deciding on an annual colour scheme and buying new pieces. Don't limit the creativity to the younger generation either, much fun can be had in the run-up to Christmas if you commandeer your children's craft box: when else will you have such a good excuse to get creative with the glitter glue and sparkly card?

Most importantly, enjoy every minute: gather friends and family to admire your efforts and make sure you take some time out to savour it too! ■

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