

Monthly Column December 2000
SOAP, PERFUMERY AND COSMETICS

Anthony C. Dweck.

Santa is coming, naturally

This month I hope to bring some jolly games, ideas and festive joy that will bring back some of the traditional messages of Christmas.

First decorate your house and appreciate the benefits that some of the old fashioned adornments can bring. Christmas decorations are said to be derived from a custom observed by the Romans of sending boughs, accompanied by other gifts, to their friends during the festival of the Saturnalia, a custom the early Christians adopted.

Mistletoe (*Viscum album*)

The Druids sent round their attendant youth with branches of the Mistletoe to announce the entrance of the new year. It is probable that the custom of including it in the decoration of our homes at Christmas, giving it a special place of honour, is a survival of this old custom.

Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

The custom of decorating houses and churches with Ivy at Christmas was forbidden by one of the early Councils of the Church, on account of its pagan associations, but the custom still remains.

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Holly, the most important of the English evergreens, is in the general mind closely connected with the festivities of Christmas, and gathered in great quantities for Yuletide decorations, both of the Church and of the home.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

A catchy little ditty:

'Down with the rosemary and so,
Down with the baies and mistletoe,
Down with the holly, ivie all
Wherewith ye deck the Christmas Hall.'

Lichen (*Usnea babarta*)

Lichen or Old man's Beard not only makes a tasteful part of your flower arrangements it can be used as a rather spooky Christmas decoration. You can also stuff your grandfather's slippers with it to kill off the nauseating odour of foot rot that he brings every Christmas to add to your festivities.

Christmas Rose (*Helleborus niger*)

A useful decoration or a really pretty present for the mother-in-law and an exciting element of risk for the children and the little yapping dog that comes with Grandma is the Christmas Rose. Their attractive appearance increases the likelihood of being eaten by children and it will stand a good chance of poisoning pets as well.

Apple (*Pyrus malus*)

On Christmas Eve there is an absolutely wizard way to spend the evening and delight your friends and neighbours. The popular custom of wassailing the orchard-trees has to be a must this year. You will need to have a farmer, his family and labourers, and an orchard. After supper, you each take a jug of cider and hot cakes (the latter are placed in the boughs of the oldest or best bearing trees in the orchard) while the cider is flung over the trees after the farmer has drunk their health.

Useful phrases include: Here's to thee, old apple-tree! Whence thou may'st bud, and whence thou may'st blow, Hats full! Caps full! Bushel-bushel-bags full! And my pockets full too! Huzza!' I think you will agree that this is a splendid entertainment

Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)

On returning from this jolly festivity, you can all sit around cutting Elder pith into round, flat shapes, dip them in oil, light them, and then float them in a glass of water. According to legend this light on Christmas Eve will reveal to the owner all the witches and sorcerers in the neighbourhood. Do not be surprised if your Mother-in-law, Marketing Manager, relations and younger sister start to glow in the dark.

Strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*)

As a little touch to round off the Christmas lunch, an idea from Lapland, strawberries are mixed with reindeer milk and blueberries to make a Christmas pudding. Mmm! Sounds really yummy!

Pennyroyal (*Mentha Pulegium*)

As you gather round the family piano after Christmas lunch, here is a little Carol called "Far away in Sicily" that I found, which tells a touching tale about Pennyroyal The tune was not given, but you could try using the music of 'God Save the Queen' or the "Camptown races", which works not at all and should set up quite a lot of giggling with the younger family members.

A home-come sailor sang this rhyme,
Deep in an ingle, mug on knee,
At Christmas time.

In Sicily, as I was told,
The children take them Pennyroyal,
The same as lurks on hill and wold In Cotsall soil.
The Pennyroyal of grace divine
In little cradles they do weave
Little cradles therewith they line

On Christmas Eve.
And there, as midnight bells awake
The Day of Birth, as they do tell,
All into bud the small buds break
With sweetest smell.
All into bud that very hour;
And pure and clean, as they do say,
The Pennyroyal's full in flower

On Christmas Day.
Far away in Sicily!
Hark, the Christmas bells do chime!
So blossom love in thee and me
This Christmas time!

And finally....

In case all of this excitement has not been enough, you can always play this game. Send the children out to collect all the berries off the ivy, holly, and mistletoe decorations. Mistletoe berries score 5, Holly berries score 2 and Ivy berries score 1 point. See who can eat the most berries without being sick and so score the most points. 10 – 15 is considered fatally good, anything above 5-10 usually merits a stomach-pump. A very Happy Christmas to all our readers!