

Santa Cruz Sentinel

GARDENING

This Week in the Garden: Wreathes for a reason



Sharon Hull -- Contributed This heart-shaped succulent wreath uses plants of different shape, size, color and texture.

By **Sharon Hull**, *This Week in the Garden*

Have you ever wondered about the origin and symbolism of the many wreaths you see adorning front doors and exterior walls, especially during the holiday season? A little research will tell you that the symbolism is ancient, going back to Etruscan times and before, often associated with the hopes for a bountiful harvest and sometimes with spiritual overtones. Now we often use wreaths to say to the world "Happy Holidays" and to provide a welcome to friends and family at the entry to our homes, as well as on interior surfaces.

At the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, two groups have been creating gorgeous wreaths for years, then



Sharon Hull -- Contributed Wreath designs are only limited by the imaginations of the creators. This one makes use of an old hubcap.

selling them to the public with proceeds dedicated to fund ongoing Arboretum programs. Earlier this week I visited the wreath-making workshops there and was treated to the sight of many volunteers hard at work on some stunning creations.

First, I was given a tour of the enticingly fragrant workshop in one of the old geodesic domes at the arboretum, where Kathie Magellan and an all-volunteer crew were making wreaths from locally sourced wild materials. The creativity was mind-boggling, as twigs, bark, grasses, lichens, shells, cones, flowers, bird's nests, feathers and other dried items were artfully intertwined in myriad ways to turn the basic circular shape into gorgeous wreaths in many sizes and colors.

The otherworldly flowers and cones grown in the Australian and South African collections at the Arboretum are especially striking in the wreaths; because these plants can only be grown in climates similar to our own, they add a touch of the exotic that is seldom seen in wreaths made in other locations.

Also seen there were tiny birdhouses made of natural materials; a specialty of one particular volunteer, these little gems will be for sale alone and also adorning some wreaths.

The second workshop was taking place in the Arboretum's nursery area, where volunteers were using succulents of every imaginable color, texture and form to create living wreaths. This group was led by expert volunteer Linda McNally, who also runs her own business called Succulent Paradise. She showed me the three sizes of moss-filled forms into which the succulent stems are inserted and where they eventually root, to form a long-lasting living ornament. The volunteers were obviously having fun with creative juices flowing as they combined colors and forms. The tools being used were unexpected but effective; they include chopsticks that create openings in the moss into which the succulent stems are placed, and old-fashioned hairpins to hold them securely until their roots branch out into the surrounding area.

Other volunteers, including a few UCSC students, were using small pumpkins as a base, gluing on a "cap" of moss and then adding tiny succulents to the moss, to create little table-top ornaments. Especially striking was a tall cone-shaped structure on which was growing literally hundreds of many-hued succulents. Who knew that succulents could be used in so many ways!

Have you ever wondered about the watering technique for a succulent wreath? McNally showed me a shallow rectangular water-filled tank into which the completed wreaths are placed when they need to be irrigated, saying that their motto is "soak it till it sinks." She noted that with very little attention, these living ornaments can last for years.

All of these beautiful items will be for sale at the annual UC Santa Cruz Arboretum [Wreath and Gift Sale](#) this Saturday, November 19.

Garden tips are provided courtesy of horticulturist Sharon Hull of San Lorenzo Garden Center. Contact her at 423-0223.

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