

Home/Garden



Christmas light

December is the darkest month. The days have been getting shorter and shorter. Like a lot of other people I have less and less energy; why should I be any more ambitious than the sun that rises after 7 and is ready to call it quits at teatime? But all that changes now.

You will read this on Christmas Eve when the year has turned. Today there is one more minute of light than there was on the twenty-first, the winter solstice. Slowly, very slowly, energy will return.

It's not surprising that in this season of darkness we celebrate the coming of light. During the winter solstice the ancient Egyptians celebrated the birth of the sun and the Persians welcomed the birth of Mithra, a god of light and truth. The Jews still commemorate the miracle of lights at Hannukah. Christians celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, the Light of the World, a birth marked by a blazing star. We need light to live. And we need the love and warmth symbolized by light to thrive.

I think it is because we have this hunger for light, that we surround ourselves with living plants during the season of darkness. Over the centuries these plants have been imbued with stories that promise the dark will end, light and life will return.

Plants abound in our Christmas legends. The Christ Child was laid in a manger of hay and, according to ancient story, the Christmas rose bloomed miraculously through the snow so that a poor urchin would have a gift for the Christ Child. Another poor boy in Mexico prayed for a gift to lay before the creche in his village. Thus grew a red flower through the snow and was named Flor de la Noche Buena (Flower of the Holy Night) because it was thought to resemble the star over Bethlehem.

Rosemary originally had white blossoms, but on the Flight to Egypt, Mary washed the Christ Child's garments and spread them on a rosemary bush to dry. For being of service the plant was rewarded with celestial blue flowers and sweet fragrance.

One plant, holly, was allowed to be used as Christmas decoration during the middle ages because it had no pagan connotation. It has always

Pat
Leuchtman

Between
The Rows



been considered a Christian plant because even at the celebration of Christ's birth, the red berries were a reminder of the blood that would be shed for us later.

We have tamed the mistletoe and hang it in our doorways so we can giggle and kiss beneath its pale berries. We no longer even demand that a berry be removed for every kiss stolen, rendering it powerless when the berries are all gone. However, mistletoe has an ancient history. It has long been considered powerful and sacred. According to Virgil, it enabled Aeneas to travel to the Underworld and return safely to the light and life. In Scandinavia it compelled enemies who met beneath its boughs to declare truce.

Fire provides warmth and light. Most of us no longer burn a yule log, but it was a charm against misfortune. Starting on Christmas Eve, and for the twelve nights of Christmas, a portion of the yule log would be burned, but some of the log would always be saved and kept under the bed for the rest of the year. There it protected the household from fire and lightning. On Christmas Eve it would be brought out and used to kindle the new yule log.

Evergreens have always been important during the long winters because they are so clearly a symbol that life does endure. Though it is a relatively new symbol, the Christmas tree — with its evergreen, never-dying boughs tipped with light and crowned by a brilliant star — is central to our modern celebration.

Surely all the flowers that we force during this season — amaryllis, tulips, narcissus and hyacinths — with their luminous blossoms and fragrance as rich as incense, are talismans against the dark, a pledge that the coming of light will once again warm and release life captured in the frozen earth. Cherish the light and have a merry Christmas.

Ros

By KAREN II
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This holiday shops and greenery offering lovely, but trimmed in the tree. Shiny trinkets complement foliage, which green if the do leaves are tipped.

The name rose, *Ros marinus*, "sea," because of profusion on coastline, especially Corsica and consider its brilliance because color, even when

If someone has one of these it may be wonderful through the winter

In our climate protected from ground and wind doors. It will thrive in the 40s, at least four hours a day. Otherwise sunny location this plant. If you plant, rosemary blossoms in late spring. The plant will bloom in full sun

Rosemary is a soil. Water it but only after moderately dry. You poke your fore watering, the top half of the plant won't tolerate. On a cold, wet soil it stands for a Try to water it needs it, not schedule.

After a cool,

