



Instructions for making a Christmas tree for the birds



These decorations are a great activity for all ages, an outside Christmas tree looks wonderful and will also help support garden wildlife through this difficult time of the year.

Use any suitable tree you have in your garden – it doesn't have to be a 'proper' Christmas tree. You could even decorate a bit of hedge!

Because the birds are already accustomed to the tree, they should find the food much more quickly, and it's much more environmentally sound. Have fun decorating it, then sit back and wait for the wildlife to find your home-made treats!

Here are some ideas for decorations to get you started.

Monkey nut garlands – buy a bag of roasted monkey nuts (peanuts in their shells) and thread them on wool using a darning needle. Cranberries threaded on wool would make a

lovely garland too. Use fresh ones, as frozen ones can be a bit squashy to thread.

Popcorn garlands – get the kind of popcorn that's sweet (not salty) but not the toffee kind. Decant the bag into a bowl and leave overnight, to allow the popcorn to soften a bit, then thread onto wool with a darning needle. If you try to do it straight after opening, they will explode!

Fat baubles – whizz up stale biscuits and porridge oats in a food processor. Add to a block of lard which has been allowed to soften. Squash it all together, adding half a bottle of food colouring, until it's completely combined. Form the mix into balls then push them onto bamboo skewers, and leave in a cold place to firm up. Once firm, the baubles can be slid off the skewer and threaded onto wool or tying wire. You need to cut an inch or so of bamboo skewer for each bauble, thread the wool or wire through the hole, loop it round the piece of skewer, then thread it back through the hole. You're then left with two ends that can be tied to the tree branch and the piece of skewer prevents the bauble falling off.

Pastry stars – roll out shortcrust pastry and use a Christmas cookie cutter to cut stars (or any other Christmas shape). Glaze with egg wash then make the holes for hanging the shapes. Bake until brown, and allow to cool. I decorated mine with cake decorator's writing icing, which comes ready to use in tubes. No time to make pastry? Toast slices of stale bread, then cut out shapes

