

YOUR HOME

Ready, set, decorate!



It's probably too late to expect your home to look like the Trail of Lights, but you still can add a few simple touches to make your yard look festive.

TAMIR KALIFA FOR AMERICAN-STATESMAN



Brennan McDonald, 75, stuck 50 ornaments onto the pointed ends of the plants in her Central Austin yard. The whole operation took about 30 minutes.

CONTRIBUTED BY CAROLYN LINDELL

With Christmas just around the corner, it's not too late to get the house looking festive.

By Carolyn Lindell
Special to the American-Statesman

ABOUT YOUR HOME

Every month we feature a different home improvement tip. Find more stories and a video of tips at austin360.com/yourhome.

Christmas is days away and you've finally **Home** continued on E6 : the front of your house has nothing festive to show for it. The place has the dim, unlighted landscape of a Grinch

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Georgia Buchtel, who has the enviable title of Christmas manager at A-Tex Christmas Store on Burnet Road. The store, open through the holidays, is in the A-Tex Family Fun Center, which sells hot tubs, pools and more.

The store offers a selection of lights, including the bigger, more old-fashioned-style bulbs, as well as LED lights, which are popular for a variety of reasons.

"They are more energy efficient, and they're supposed to last longer," Buchtel said. "They're a lot brighter."

To save time – remember, it is less than a week until Christmas – and to pack more punch, you might consider purchasing larger decorations that come with plenty of lights ready to go. They might cost more than a plain strand of lights, but who's the one who waited this long to finally be merry?

A-Tex sells colorful star spheres with 100 indoor/outdoor lights.

"They usually just hang them from the trees," Buchtel said.

In addition, for a quick bit of cheer, you can line the front walkway with candy cane path lights.

A-Tex also offers custom wreaths and garlands with indoor/outdoor lighting, and decorated with various ribbons, beads, bows and more.

"You can go simple or elaborate," she said.

Stay safe, Santa

Keep in mind, as you put up lights and ornaments – especially in your last-minute haste – that each year people fall from ladders while holiday decorating, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

One of the commission's safety recommendations is "Always place your ladder on level and firm ground." Other sug-



Quick decorations can have your home looking festive in a hurry. Larry Linscomb went with inflatables, including a 10-foot snowman. CONTRIBUTED BY CAROLYN LINDELL



Add a wreath to your door and try to string lights around the frame. CONTRIBUTED BY CAROLYN LINDELL
She said, cre-

he said. "You can have shrubs and trees done in an hour."

Some holiday decorators – even those who don't procrastinate – prefer to avoid using many lights, while getting decorations up fast.

For the second year, Lesley Woods in the Brentwood neighborhood decorated a pear tree in her front yard with large ornaments hung from fishing line and ribbons. (How about a partridge in that pear tree, too!)

"It's much easier (than hanging lights), and to me, more people appreciate it," Woods said. "I get a lot of positive comments."

Woods said she and several friends had fun tying the 40 or so jumbo ornaments and bells onto branches on Thanksgiving Day. Working with

others to help hold tree limbs, she said, "You can get a lot done in 30 to 45 minutes."

Though one recently broke hitting the tree, she said the ornaments – which she picks up at stores and sales – don't usually get damaged.

"The larger ones need to be hung far enough away from the trunk so they don't hit," she said.

After the holidays, she cuts the ornaments down and stores them in her attic, she said.

Nearby, Larry Linscomb has lived up his yard for years with huge inflatable snowmen and Santa Clauses. This year, his yard includes a 10-foot blow-up snowman – \$58, Linscomb said – waving at passersby, along with an 8-foot Santa. Tigger wearing a

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gestions are at <http://1.usa.gov/18WTAtR>.

In addition, a 2013 report by the National Fire Protection Association says that from 2007-2011, "holiday lights and other decorative lighting with line voltage were involved in an estimated average of 150 home structure fires per year. These fires caused an average of nine civilian deaths, 16 civilian injuries, and \$8.4 million in direct property damage per year."

So be careful out there.

Among the report's safety tips, it advises following the manufacturer's instructions. Additionally, "Lights with worn, damaged or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used." More safety guidelines can be found at nfpa.org.



Check your lights before you plug them in to make sure they are safe. If the wires look questionable, start over with new lights. PHOTOS.COM.

Alternatives

You could opt not to use lights for outdoor decorating – or you could hire help.

Steve Huskey, of Tex-

as Christmas Lights Installers, said many of his clients are women who "don't want to get on a ladder or can't get on a ladder."

Huskey said he has had crews working all over Central Texas on jobs large and small.

"We've got crews that can install lights on skyscrapers. We've got crews that can install lights on just a house," he said. Though they have been busy this season, calls tend to slow down this close to Christmas, Huskey said.

"The phone stops ringing after Dec. 15," he said.

For folks wanting to illuminate the yard quickly, Huskey recommends using net lights, though he cautioned they have a limited shelf life.

"The easiest, quickest thing to get lights on the house is those nets,"



Lesley Woods decorated a pear tree in her front yard with large ornaments hung from fishing line and ribbons. She said the project took about 30 minutes. CONTRIBUTED BY CAROLYN LINDELL



Put up some candy canes or displays that already have lights attached to make decorating easier. AMERICAN-STATESMAN 2003

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Santa hat also greets visitors, and another Santa pilots a helicopter. He previously had an inflatable nativity set.

He used to put lights on the house and trees, but this is simpler and less treacherous.

"I don't want to be up on the roof," said Linscomb, 69. Setting up the inflatables takes only a couple of hours, he said, compared with four to five hours for the lights.

Besides, he loves the reaction from others.

"The kids in the neighborhood like them," he said.

After the holidays, he deflates the decorations and fits them all in plastic crates.

He enjoys decorating his yard throughout the year, with Halloween scarecrows and Easter bunnies.

"I'm a big kid at heart," Linscomb said.

After the holidays

Once the holidays have passed, your work isn't over. It's time to get organized – and possibly, stocked up – for next year.

Jennifer Lava, a professional organizer, said the post-holidays provide an opportunity to assess what you have.

"The first thing I would recommend is to gather everything together as far as the holiday stuff goes and see, 'Do I really want to use this next year?'" Lava said. If items don't work or you don't like them anymore, then it's time to get rid of them.

Having a clear idea of what you have helps you figure out the best way to store everything, she said.

"Some of it comes down to how much space you have to store it in," she said. "If you have a limited amount of space, maybe things all do have to go together in one container." Otherwise, you can put similar items to-

gether, such as separate boxes for lights, ornaments, wreath and so on.

Clearly labeling containers will be helpful for next year, too, she said.

Lastly, you might want to pick up items on clearance, especially if you need to replace worn-out goods that you just got rid of.

"I'm not the biggest fan of encouraging people to acquire more stuff," Lava said, "but right after Christmas, a lot of stuff will go on sale.... You could replace those lights right away if you know you are going to need new lights because you have cleared out the bad ones."

Lava, president of the Austin chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers, encourages declutter-ers to attend Clear Your Clutter Day on 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Jan. 31 at Bethany United Methodist Church, 10010 Anderson Mill Road. Information is at napo.austin.com.

As well, some places collect and recycle old holiday lights, such as the Recycling Center on Des-sau Road, which even pays by the pound, said manager Linda Drago.

"We are trying to avoid polluting landfills," she said.

After cleaning out the holiday debris, you might want to find the most suitable containers to put stuff away.

"Getting the right box and the right number of boxes for your project is definitely the key," said Jenny Hanna-Chambers, of the Container Store on Research Boulevard.

The store offers many different sized containers, she said, including those that could be used for "awkwardly shaped outdoor decor."

A popular container has a hinged, attached lid, she said, which makes it easier because "you are not misplacing your lid."

The store sees a lot of hustle and bustle after

the holidays, she said.

"The week after Christmas it definitely is a priority for a lot of our customers," she said. "They

come in and they are like, 'OK, we need to get everything packed away.'"

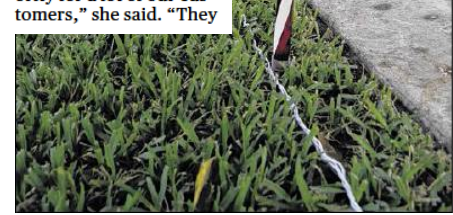


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