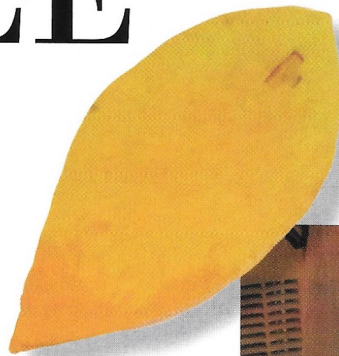


Practice gratitude *with a* THANKSGIVING TREE

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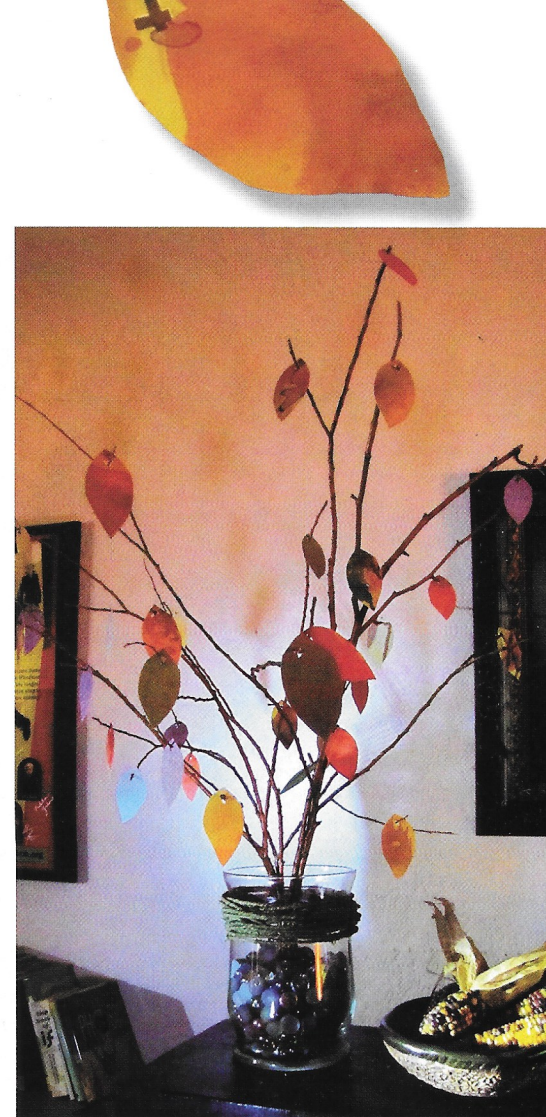


Pandemics. Protests. Politics. With everything going on in the world today, it's hard to be grateful. It has become far too easy to miss the trees for the forest fire and yet, if we really think about it, we all have things for which to be thankful. Whether it's family, friends, pets, or actions, they exist all around us. Sometimes what we all need is a visual reminder of those things. That's where the Thanksgiving Tree comes in.

Start by gathering together a few ingredients. First, you'll need a sturdy jar or vase, sheets of colorful card stock, scissors, a hole punch, and a selection of pens. Other items you may need are spray paint, glitter, ribbon, wire or twine, and marbles, glass beads, rocks, or rice.

Next you'll need small branches. It doesn't really matter where they come from. You can take a walk through your neighborhood, a park, or a favorite walking trail. Watch for interesting angles and unusual shapes, but make sure each branch has tiny branches that can be clipped to become pegs.





Once you've got everything you need, gather the branches together and wipe them down with a damp cloth or sponge. Clip off small branches, leaving at least a half inch visible to create pegs. If you're feeling particularly festive, you can also paint, stain, cover in glitter, or coat the branches with spray-on shellac. Be as creative as you want to be, or just leave them in their natural state.

While the branches are drying, get out your jar or vase. If it's a clear container, fill it two-thirds of the way with marbles, glass beads, colorful rocks, or rice. Or, you could wrap the jar in wrapping paper and tie it all together with some ribbon. Be creative!

After the branches have dried, take some wire or twine and tie them together at the base, arranging them so they give the impression of a small tree. This is not really necessary, but you'll find that once you start decorating your tree, the branches will move about if they're not tethered together.

Next, place your branches into the jar or vase and arrange them so they give the impression of a tree. This is where tethering comes in handy!

Now that your tree has been formed, it's time to create the leaves. Take sheets of colorful card stock and cut them into leaf shapes, between one and two inches in length. Standard football shapes will work just fine, but if you want to get creative and make autumn leaf shapes, go for it. Circles, triangles, or hearts will work just as well, as long as they're all the same size.

Use the hole punch to cut holes on one edge of each cutout. If it is a leaf shape, the hole should be where the stem would attach to a branch. Place all the cutouts into a small bowl or box and place them next to the tree with a selection of pens.

Now, as you think about things to be thankful for, write them on individual leaves and hang them from the branch pegs.

Anybody in the household should be invited to participate, along with friends, family, or anybody else you may host during the holidays.

Though the Thanksgiving Tree takes its name from the holiday it emulates, it can be left up year-round, depending on your inclinations. Check in with the tree occasionally and read the comments. It will become a constant reminder that, even in the toughest of times, we all have things, and people, for which to be grateful. ■




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