



A White Christmas:

From the garden into your home

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ELIZABETH SAMUDIO

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas. No, not the kind covered in snow, though that would be lovely; my thoughts are dancing with cool blooms as pure as Snow White, so when kissed by holiday charm, I awaken to an enchantment of narcissus, cream colored rose poinsettias and cool weather Camilla blooms.

With such a heavy trend toward artificial Christmas trees, it is refreshing to bring the garden into the home for the holidays. It still imprints my mind so wonderfully when, after several years of not visiting the Northwest for Christmas, I was eager to experience a white blanket of comfort snow; ironically enough, my family and I were greeted with rain. But when I walked into my mother's home, the familiar smell of a fresh Christmas made it all happen for me.

Mom had set a lovely white table with fresh flowers. As in times past, she had forced paper white blooms in Waterford vases, filling every room, and her earthen ceramics overflowed with eggshell colored hydrangeas.

Now each year, I relive this dream by always having plenty of paper white bulbs on hand so I can start the blooms eight weeks before the season's highlight. There is no bulb easier to force than tiny white narcissus. Water, earth, and sunlight are all they need to give you a white Christmas.

In the south, magnolia blooms are a natural. Little gem magnolias, if you provide a good fall feeding of natural fertilizer, given certain weather conditions, can be counted on to set off a myriad of lemon-scented blooms in December. In fact, this makes a lovely alternate Christmas tree and can be planted in the dead of winter. You may have to shop around, but what a lovely seasonal gift! Remember, it is always wise to call ahead when it comes to live plants and the holidays.

Of course, there are always cream-colored rose poinsettias. I can't think of an easier and more reliable way to decorate than with these magnificent plants. I always count on the sheer elegance of this Mexico native. And to disarm your fears, they are not toxic.

The sheer beauty of white naturally flows into the New Year and beyond. Just make sure you pay the extra charge for good healthy plants. Given proper care, there is no reason why your plants shouldn't keep perky till Valentine's Day. This is an incentive to tuck a few double pink poinsettias in your décor.

I would have to say that camellias are my favorite winter evergreen bushes. Any thing that blooms in cold weather never ceases to amaze me and demands my attention. I have several in my garden and, though they come in many colors, I admit my mother's influence of creams and whites shows up on my camellias. Bear in mind, when you plant this shrub, you need to find a spot in your garden that provides sunshine in the winter and shade in the summer. It makes sense to plant this acid-loving plant beneath your deciduous shade trees.

I can't talk about winter blooms without mentioning hellebores — also known as the Lenten Rose. Again, this unusual perennial comes in several colors, but in creamy white it shows off beautifully in the winter garden. These evergreen perennials are hard to come by, but once found, they add interest and charm to a southern home. The placement of this plant is vital—shade.

The selection is grand; I haven't even begun to pick the garden. The main thing is to stay in harmony. Like so many of you, I tend to go over the top. But aren't we all learning that it's the simplistic, fresh touches that bring about a beautiful, less stressful Christmas ambiance?

I like to mention my mother because she, of all people I know, doesn't leave one rock unturned. Yet she has learned the art of not over-complicating the holidays. One Christmas, Glenda Elizabeth used a huge poinsettia rather than go to all the work of a decorated Christmas tree. Of course, my younger brother was mortified; he promptly went for a jaunt into the mountains and found his enchantment—a white covered Christmas tree.

In Fort Worth, we don't have the option of trekking to the snow-covered mountains; but there's no need to be left out in the cold. Awaken to the calm of a fresh Christmas—with heaven's splendor ... white winter blooms.

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