



Cornell University Cooperative Extension



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Grapevine Wreaths

Overview:

In this activity, youth will collect grapevines in the fall and create homemade wreaths from them which can be then decorated according to any themes which you may choose depending on what your program is focused in.



Goals:

Participants do the following:

- Learn pruning safety
- Learn to work with one another while collecting grapevines
- Learn some of the history surrounding grapes
- Create their own wreaths by wrapping vines around a bucket.
- Decorate wreaths according to a predetermined theme

Theme Suggestions:

- Holiday (Christmas, Halloween, etc)- decorate with themed ribbons, silk flowers, foliage, or berries
- Natural materials- decorate with seed pods, dried flowers, etc
- Patriotism- decorate with colored ribbons and materials to represent a country or state (i.e.: dogwood blooms on a wreath representing Virginia)

*the grapevines should not be collected before hand unless working with very young children. Part of this activity involves the actual collecting of the grapevines from the woods, so it is best to find an area with plenty of vines growing all around. Grape vines from vineyards may be substituted but are not desirable as they may have been treated with pesticides.

Ages: 7 and up

(Activity can be adapted to fit all age groups)

Activity Time:

Making of Wreath: 2-5 hrs

Wreath Drying Time: 1 week

Decorating: 1-2 hours

Materials:

Wild Grapevines*

Pruning shears

5-10 gallon buckets

Strong Twine or String

Trim for Wreaths (ribbon, silk flowers, fake grapes, etc)

Scissors

Cost of Materials:

\$0-\$10 per wreath, depending on the type of materials used to decorate. The vines should be free.

Requirements:

Grapevines must be collected after the first frost.

Preparation:

- Make sure that you have selected an appropriate area to collect grapevines. Wild grapevines like to grow on hedgerows or twine around trees in the edge of the woods, so chances are you will find lots of grapevines in these places.
- When selecting the site, take care to look around and make sure it is appropriate and safe for the age group you will be working with.
- If you are working with younger children, for example, choose grapevines that are growing lower to the ground and be sure that the area is easy to move around in and free of poisonous plants.
- Make sure that participants dress for the weather. Since you will be collecting after the first frost, it will most likely be chilly!

Tips/Suggestions:

Have a contest to see which pair can collect the longest vine.

Involve participants- Ask if any of them know about pruning safety, grapes, or have ever made grapevine wreaths. If they have, allow them to help instruct.

Instructions:

- Participants should pair up and find grapevines. Have them work as pairs to dislodge the grapevines. This can be made into a “tug of war” game for younger children. If you’re working with younger children, instruct them to ask for help when cutting the grapevines down. If you are working with pre-teens or teens, this is a good opportunity to educate them about pruning safety. (See supplement)
- Each participant should collect at least 6 lengths of vine. This number will vary depending on the thickness of the vines and the size of your bucket. A larger bucket or thinner vines will require more lengths.
- Have participants strip the leaves and green parts off of the lengths of vines. The hardened tendrils should be left on.
- Give each pair a bucket (or assign groups to buckets, depending on how many buckets you were able to obtain), and have them begin wrapping the vines around the bucket to form a circle. Have each participant continue wrapping the vines around, securing loose ends with the twine. (warning: stiff grapevines may snap back, notify participants of this)
- When the wreaths are big enough, use the twine to secure all loose ends and remove the wreaths from the buckets. They should now be put somewhere safe to dry.
- Discuss the history of grapes or the lore surrounding the theme you have chosen for decorations.

Decorations:

The decorations can be chosen to match just about any theme. Since this is a fall project, decorating the wreaths for Christmas or another holiday that falls during that season is a great way to give participants something they can bring home and use as part of their family decorating.

If you are working in a classroom setting, the wreaths can be decorated in the spirit of the subject matter being covered. The wreaths will take a week or so to dry after they have been molded, so this setting is ideal. A few examples of this are listed above.

One tip for decorating is to have the participants choose which decorations they want to use during the week that the wreaths are being allowed to dry. Each participant can be allowed to choose his or her own theme according to the criteria presented, and can pick which materials fit that theme.

Note: if you are working with younger children, be careful of using toxic glues, glue guns, and small objects when decorating. Make sure to educate any older youth on the proper uses of any equipment you are using; never assume that everyone knows how to use it or the safety issues surrounding a particular item.

Supplement:

Background Information on Grapes

Grapes were one of the first plants to be domesticated (bred for use by humans).

The wine grape originated in the Middle East.

Another variety of grape originated in North America.

Grapes can be used to make wine, jelly, pie, tarts, and lots of other foods.

Extract from grape seeds has been shown to have many benefits such as improving cardiovascular health and possibly reducing the risk of cancer.

Compounds found in red wine have been shown to have many benefits to health.

Grape vines can grow to be very old (300+ years!), but must be pruned in order to keep the fruit accessible.

Grapes produce fruit on branches that are 2 years old.

The “mission vine” in California covers over half an acre!

There are over 5000 named varieties of grapes to date.

Pruning Safety

Make sure that you are familiar with the pruning tools you will be using to clip the vines into useable lengths. Know how to work the safety and instruct participants in the group on this. Make sure to cover basic concepts like how to hold the tool, how to cut, and the proper way to handle the tool when not in use. When working with young children, it is best to cut the vines for them, as some tools can be fairly dangerous.