

## episode 44 show notes and advice

This week Sarah and Arthur talk about what to forage and bring in now to make a beautiful, sustainable Christmas wreath. Sarah reckons as soon as December starts it's fine to have a twinkly, wild and wacky garden wreath on your door, so that's the subject of today's podcast.

### In this episode, discover:

- Why Arthur loves foraging and how he does it – with permission!
- Lots of sustainable wreath ideas – getting away from using lots of wire or things that will end up in landfill.
- Arthur and Sarah's favourite plants to forage for wreaths: Arthur chooses evergreens like Portuguese laurel, Sarah favours grasses like Panicum 'Sparkling Fountain' - they both love using bracken.
- Tips for how to use hydrangeas successfully in wreaths.
- Arthur's guide to making a large-scale wreath using branches.
- Sarah's simple mistletoe and eucalyptus wreath.
- Sarah shares her Vienetta-like Coffee Meringue Cake recipe she's making now – it's a real cracker for Christmas.

### Links & references:

Order Sarah's new book: <https://bit.ly/2TWHJcz>

Shop on the Sarah Raven Website: <http://bit.ly/3jvbaeu>

Get in touch: [info@sarahraven.com](mailto:info@sarahraven.com)

Follow Sarah: <https://bit.ly/3jDTvBp>

Follow Arthur: <https://bit.ly/3jxSKK5>

## Episode 44 advice sheet

### Arthur's favourite foraged plants for wreaths

- Evergreens are the way to go, especially those with waxy, shiny leaves like Portuguese laurel and bay. These will dry and fade naturally into the wreath.
- Ivy is very easy to get and people don't mind you picking it - but it will go limp quite quickly if not in water.
- Hornbeam or beech leaves look great crinkled up and crispy in a wreath.
- Bracken has twisting and turning tendrils, like the understorey of coniferous forest, with colours that naturally complement traditional wreath décor like pinecones.

- If Arthur had an hour he'd stuff his wreath with bracken, beech and bay, festoon with copper wire lights and leave it as that.

### **Sarah's favourites**

- Magnolia grandiflora - it really lasts, the top of leaf stays shiny green for weeks then the underside is a beautiful, rusty, coppery colour. Sarah uses this as the base of her wreath and for swags over her inglenook fireplace, which last despite the heat of the fire, then slowly turn brown with lovely, twisty shapes as they dry. Sarah will dip the odd one into silver or bronze to highlight their shape.
- Panicum 'Sparkling Fountain' - Sarah loves this grass for wreaths. It's light and airy like the poshest Parisian patisserie with spun sugar over the top. It looks great left as it is or sprayed in gold, silver or bronze paint.
- Chasmanthium latifolium, American Northern oats grass - elegant and beautiful, Sarah cuts this for the Christmas table and for her wreaths.
- Bracken - no one will mind you picking it. Let it dry if it is a bit soggy. It will get wonderful crispy shapes and the beautiful Highland cattle colour looks so good with Christmas decorations.
- Seed heads – if you don't have dazzling colour you need dazzling shapes – this is where seed heads of fennel, angelica, dill and alliums help to give a lovely, sparkling 3D addition to a wreath. Fennel and angelica keep their seed heads really late, alliums need to be picked and dried much earlier.
- Look out for crab apples and the end of the rosehips and hawthorns for some berries.

### **Using hydrangeas in wreaths**

Arthur is a great hydrangea addict but says it's hard to get them looking nice this late in the year. They bleach quite early on and start looking tea-baggy. Arthur picks his Christmas hydrangeas in the first cold spell in October. Of course, you can buy them to get their full colour, more expensive at this time of year, but if you really love them what could be nicer? If you want a colourful hydrangea wreath, hang it just before Christmas - as soon as they feel the cold they start to bleach.

### **Arthur's recipe for a naturalistic wreath**

Inspired by Melissa from Jam Jar Flowers who made wreathes with branches fashionable.

Weave silver birch and hazel bare stem branches into a copper wire base, laid one on top of another, all going in the same direction. Thread in some clematis, old man's beard, for a fluffy waterfall effect, then add seed heads and copper wire lights.

### **Moss wreaths**

Arthur and Sarah reuse their copper wire wreath bases year-on-year, using string or twine to stuff with moss scarified from the lawn, aiming to only use materials that can go on the compost or be reused.

Arthur adds long-lasting holly to his mossy, evergreen wreaths, adding a few pillar box red holly berries paired with burgundy hawthorn berries for a classic British, Dickensian look.

### **Sarah's simple mistletoe and eucalyptus wreath**

Sarah says there is nothing more Christmassy and magical than using mistletoe for a wreath, if available. She will cut curtains of mistletoe into little bunches and feed them into a moss base. If kept cool, this should last a month on the door. Eucalyptus is a lovely companion filler with sparkly, silvery leaves. Add battery wires lights to turn on when come home and turn off when go to bed.

### **Coffee Meringue Cake**

This is a fantastic, luxurious pudding, a bit like a Vienetta. It is incredibly easy to make – you can buy the meringues - and Sarah recommends this recipe for a backup Christmas pudding.

Sarah has started making this now for Christmas. It can be prepared several weeks ahead, handy at this time of year, as life starts to get a bit manic.

### **Serves 8-10**

- 2 tbsp of strong coffee
- 1 tbsp boiling water
- 750ml double cream
- 1 tbsp caster sugar
- 1 tbsp coffee liqueur
- 3 pieces of thinly sliced stem ginger
- 1 tbsp ginger syrup
- Pomegranates and pomegranate juice to serve

### **For the meringues:**

- 6 egg whites
- 180g granulated sugar
- 180g caster sugar
- 6 egg whites
- 180g granulated sugar
- 180g caster sugar
- sunflower oil

To make the meringues, whisk 6 egg whites till they're very stiff and dry.

Slowly add (bit by bit) 180g granulated sugar, whizz that in until the egg whites regain their former stiffness. Then fold in 180g caster sugar with a large metal spoon.

In serving spoon sized dollops, spoon on to greaseproof paper, rubbed with a trace of sunflower oil.

Preheat the oven to 110°C (gas mark 1/4 or lowest setting). Bake for about 3 hours until crisp.

Once cooked you can just turn off the oven and leave overnight.

Have 2 tbsp coffee cooled and ready. Whip 750ml double cream to soft peak stage and add 1 tbsp caster sugar and 1 tbsp Kahlua (coffee liqueur) and half the coffee liquid.

Break the meringue into pieces. Fold the meringue and cream together, and add 3 pieces of stem ginger, thinly sliced with 1 tbsp of ginger syrup. The ginger cuts through the sweetness of the meringue and cream.

Spoon into a deep (8cm x 22cm) straight-sided round cake tin, lined with non-stick paper.

Marble the top with the remaining coffee. And freeze for at least 24 hours.

Serve straight from the freezer. Take out 10 mins before you serve, drizzling with pomegranate juice and plenty of pomegranate seeds or raspberries over the top.

This recipe features in Sarah Raven's Garden Cookbook and Complete Christmas.