

Deck the halls

Although Christians did not worship Saturn, they continued the old Roman custom of decorating their homes with evergreens to celebrate the birthday of Jesus.

Holly and Ivy

Holly, one of the most popular evergreens, is a symbol of good luck, just like the horseshoe. A holly bush planted in the garden is said to keep the house safe from lightning. Farmers used to hang a sprig of holly in their cowsheds on Christmas Eve to make sure they had a good supply of milk and healthy calves during the coming year.

Ivy, which is a soft and clinging plant, was once thought to be a symbol of woman. Holly, with its tough and leathery leaves, was supposed to be a symbol of man. Entwining holly and ivy in a Christmas decoration was supposed to ensure peace in the home between husband and wife in the year ahead.

Christians told stories about the holly to link it with the Christmas story. Even its name reminds us of these stories, for *holly* comes from the same word as *holy*.

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Mistletoe

Mistletoe was a special plant for the Druids, who lived in Britain before the days of Christianity. If it is to flourish, it needs the support of a tree, such as the oak. The oak was a sacred tree to the Druids, who believed that the evergreen mistletoe kept the spirit of the tree alive during the winter months. Mistletoe became a symbol of peace and friendship.

A traditional kissing bush

A kissing bush is easy to make – simply cover a framework of hoops with evergreens and hang a sprig of mistletoe from the centre. Any girl who is kissed beneath the bush will be sure of good luck and a happy marriage.



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