Gather & Make: Four Garden Projects with Lorene Edwards Forkner

Chapter 1 - Gather & Make: Four Garden Projects

Overview

All my life, I have loved to make things with my hands, crafts going out into the garden, and so it's only natural as I grew into being a gardener that I would take that same handmade approach to the garden. I'm Lorene Edwards Forkner. I live in the Pacific Northwest and I'm a gardener, an artist, and a maker. Throughout the year, in every season, I gather and make different projects from my garden. We're going to do a moss ball called a kokedama, which is a very alternative way to display your plants either indoors or out. We're going to capture the season of winter and citrus with a delicious salt that you can add to things that you're preparing, really brightens up the cold, dark months. We're going to mark the season of herbs by inking leaves and creating prints. Definitely a mark of the summer season. For the last project, I'll show you how a very simple method of threading botanicals as a way to capture the season and create some innovative and fresh new ways to display plants indoors. I love the way these four projects that are garden based allow me to craft and create something that I can bring indoors. It's a seasonal flavour or a mark of the bloom season, and it makes a nice gift to share with others.

Materials

Our gather and make class. We're going to work on four different projects that bring the outdoors inside common garden materials, things that you should be able to have around or easily purchase. The first project is a kokedama, which is a moss ball, and for that we'll need a four inch nursery pot. This is a golden pothos, an indoor plant. We'll also need a mixture of potting soil and peat moss, and one part bentonite clay, which is in essence cat litter. You want to look for the type of cat litter that is made of bentonite clay. We're going to add some water to that mixture to get it to hold together. Then you'll need a small amount of sphagnum moss bowls to keep your plants in. You'll need fishing line, scissors to cut your fishing line, and ornamental twine. If you want to add that as a decorative layer, I use a brush to clear off the potting soil from the finished project. You'll need a piece of sheet moss, roughly 12 by 12 inches. I live in the Pacific Northwest, and so I gathered this out of my garden. It is also available floral supply craft stores or online, and then I work with gloves simply because this is an already messy project. I try and limit it. Our next project is from a project in my book, Color In and Out of the Garden, and this is citrus salt. It's a very simple project, but it adds so much life and spark to any of your foods that you make with it. You'll need a pretty good size orange. Make sure that it's because we're using the zest of it. It's a good idea to have an organic wax free scrub it really well. In warm water, you'll need about a half a cup of flaky salt. This is a Maldon salt. You'll need a bowl to mix it in, and then a microplane zester, which is how you remove the zest from the orange, and then to dry the project when we're done a small cookie sheet or even a dinner sized plate for our leaf prints. We're going to be using ink pads and using a variety of botanicals that you can gather from your garden. I've gathered some herbs. I think of these as going into my kitchen, so you can even get those at the grocery store. You'll need a stack of scrap paper, and then we'll be making our print on a drawing paper. I like to do kind of a toned cream colour. I just think it's pretty. Our last project will be threading botanicals, kind of a fresh new way to display flowers in the house. For that, you'll need a spool of 20 gauge florist wire needle nose pliers to bend your wire, a series of botanicals. For these projects, we're going to be using hyacinths, some

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carnations, waxed thread with a tapestry needle, and then we have this little narrow necked vase that will show how to display this.

Kokedama
A kokedama is planting your plant. It could be an indoor plant, an outdoor plant to live in a mud ball that's encased in moss its roots. Go back to the ancient tradition in Japan, bonsai. It's also a very fresh, kind of innovative way to have your house plants at home. We're going to start by taking your plant out of its pot and removing all the soil from its roots. We're going to put that into the bowl that we have our little bit of sphagnum in, 10 00:00:34,260 --> 00:00:35,093 and then add some water to that so that the sphagnum moss is getting hydrated. 12 00:00:39,870 --> 00:00:40,703 Now come to your bin where you're going to mix the potting soil, the peat moss and the bentonite clay, which I'm just going to refer to as kitty litter because it is, and mix it all together. This is a dusty, a dusty mix. You don't want to breathe this, so get it pretty homogenised before you add water. That looks pretty good. Next we're going to add water and mix it again until we get a dough-like consistency. There's not really a set amount of water because one day peat moss might take up more moisture than another day. So you can see it's still really dry and crumbly. It's best to go slow, add a little bit as you can. Once you add too much, then you have to have additional potting soil or peat moss and everything to go back in, so it's better to just sneak up on it and go slow. What we're looking for is a mix that's going to hold together when you compress it in your hands. See, this is still too dry because it's crumbly. Looks like I'm going to need some more water. So here I'm almost there. You can see it's holding together, but it still crumbles a bit when we break it in half. So let's add a little bit more water. It's very much by feel there. This is starting to feel like we're getting there. So I form these little mud balls is to just use my palms. My palms aren't very big. So if you were using a much larger size plant, you might want to go the size of a grapefruit. This is more just like an orange, maybe even a small orange. So when I squeeze it, it holds together and it holds together pretty well. You want to be able to break it in half and have it hold together like that. So that's pretty good. Whenever I make kokedamas at home, I tend to do more than one at a time because you've got all your materials out. Why not have fun and spend the afternoon doing this? So I'm going to make several of these mud balls at a time and you can just leave those there. Once you've made as many of the mud balls that you want to do for the afternoon, go ahead and we'll move to the next step. Holding the ball in the palm of your hands using your thumbs, try and break it into two halves, roughly equal halves there. So that's what we have. What we're going to do is wrap the roots of the plant in this sphagnum moss that's in there. Give it a good squeeze to get out the additional water, and then we're going to sandwich inside these two halves. What you're doing is you're providing a whole new growing environment for the plant to live in so you don't have a pocket of soil in the middle of this new soil mix. Then you're going to mush it together so that you have, I am going to put a little bit more up here at the top to support the neck of it, but you basically want the roots not too much deeper in the soil than what they were previously. You're not burying the plant in it, you are just giving it a nice new home. So that's basically what you're looking for. You've got the roots of the plant wrapped in sphagnum moss and then encased in this nutrient rich, but also very, very moist ball. So you can set that back down in your bin. And now we're going to take this beautiful piece of green moss, one of the benefits of living in the Pacific Northwest, and we're going to flip it so that the green side is down. What we're going to do is to wrap that soil ball in this, so it's wrapped up tidy with the moss. But before you do that, you're going to want to cut several lengths of fishing line. This is when you're going to wish you had several more hands and I

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tend to put it around my neck just so I know where it is. So now you take your soil, your soil ball, and your happy little plant, and then you just start tucking it in. The larger your sheet of moss, the kind of easier it is to continue to tuck it in, but you can also piece, there's sheet moss, especially if you've bought it from a florist supply or something, you're going to want to soak it. I should have said that you want moist sheet moss. If you're getting it off from a commercial source, it's going to be very dry and kind of brittle, but moss is miraculous that way and that when it gets moistened again, it kind of comes back to life. So here just kind of removing the extra where I don't need it, but then if I've got a hole, I can pick another piece and patch it in all. So now we've got our moss blanket around our kokedama ball, and we're going to grab our fishing line from roughly the middle of it and we're going to wrap. It taught to start making it more of a solid. And I always use, thank goodness you can't see fishing line because I tend to use as much of it as I feel is necessary. So when you come together with your first swatch, knot it in place, cut off the extra. I've tried doing this where I cut a bunch of lengths ahead of time and that's not a good idea. Then you just get tangled up in your fishing line. So there I'm finding the middle of my line. I'm going to start and then I'm going to just do the same thing again. I'm going to wrap it. And then once you have one half done, then you wrap the other one, the opposite direction. The moss is pretty much formed into a ball. It's snug. It's not really going to go anywhere, but that's when I go in and of finesse the shape, how much do I want? So you see up here, the moss is creeping up. So I press that down and I might do one more piece of fishing line. So here I'm going across the top because I want to add some definition to that part of the ball. So that's pretty good. You've got a pretty roundish orb. It's beauty of the organic world. Nothing is perfectly round or even or symmetrical. So now we're going to use whatever type of twine you want to finish it off. The ball is actually held together by the fishing line, but this is just another layer of detail and I think is a nice organic touch. Go ahead and give yourself a lot. We're not doing it nearly as much as we did the fishing line, but again, I work from the middle and this one I pay a little bit more attention to how it's actually arranged on the ball. There you go. So to finish, you might just go in there with your scissors, making sure you don't clip the twine or the fishing line and just tidy it up so it's more of a roundish figure, whatever you'd like. I'm trimming these up so that it kind of just tidies it and reveals the round shape a little bit more. Then I take the brush and just use that to remove the additional soil from the leaves. And that's my brand new little kokedama. And over the years that I've had these at home, I've taken displaying them in a watertight bowl, something that's glazed on the inside. It's so much easier to keep it watered that way. You just add some water to the bottom and then it soaks it up. I've done this with an African violet, which really doesn't want its leaves wet anyway, and the dear thing lived for a very, very long time. These kokedamas that I've also made are for outdoor plants. This is a black Mondo grass and this is a hardy maidenhair fern. So these could live in the garden. You would need to keep them watered, but they could live in the garden. They don't have to come inside. The trick with the kokedama is to not let it go completely dry because then you're trying to desaturate all that clay and the peat moss and everything. So if that does happen, just fill like a quart or a big bowl of water and set the kokedama down in it until the bubbles stop coming up. I think you'll have fun working with the kokedama. It's kind of a different way to present plants. It's very hands-on, so you feel very much in relationship with your plant. And in time the plant will continue to grow. It'll put on new growth, and this is a great way that I can go out in the garden at the end of winter, gather the moss and put it to use and bring it indoors with my plants.

Winter citrus salt

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Citrus salt is a project I make every winter. Not only is that the time when all the variety of citrus is at peak freshness and their most fragrant and most varieties, so I use lemon or grapefruit lime. For today's salt, we're going to be using a naval orange. I recommend getting an organic, preferably unwaxed orange because we are going to be using the zest itself. Give it a good scrub under warm water with some soap because you want it, the freshest it can be to zest the orange. A microplane makes fast work of it, and the zests are nice and tiny little pieces. The smell is heavenly. Like I said, when you're halfway through a winter up in the Pacific Northwest and you haven't seen the sun in months, this is a little bit of a way to bring the sun indoors doors. So by zesting directly over the bowl of salt, you're capturing all those oils that are spraying out from the oranges. As you're removing the zest too, as you're zesting, try to just stay to the bright orange part and not get into the pith, which is the white layer underneath the orange that gets a little bit bitter, so all the flavour is in the outer orange skin. All right, that's pretty good. I have a naked orange. Now. Go ahead and take all that good stuff off the back. And now what you're going to do with exquisitely clean hands is get in there just lightly, almost massaging it in. You're distributing those oils all through the salt. I'm using a flaky sea salt, so I want to keep that delicate structure, crystalline structure. But you can see the salt takes on the colour of the oils. Salt is also a dehydrating factor, so that will help your zest dry out very quickly. The smell. The smell, once it's all mixed and you've got a nice kind of homogenous, bland, your salt is now orange. It's citrus salt, then dump it out onto a small sheet pan or a dinner plate or anything. I usually just leave it overnight to dry on the counter. But if you're in a very, very moist or humid climate, you could stick it in a low oven, very, very low oven to have it dry out overnight. This is a citrus salt that I made earlier this winter, and you can see it's completely dry, it's delicious added on top of goat cheese or maybe if you're making a fish dish. I like to add it to my homemade granola and yoghourt. It adds a little bit of the sun to everything you make. This other one that I made is not salt, but it's the same principle. And for this one, I used a coarse sugar and a floral tea and just again, massaged it with my hands. There wasn't any drying because everything was dry already, but this is a delicious addition to a cup of tea. Preserving blooms and flavours of the garden is a wonderful project in winter, and it's really delicious. At any time of the year.

Inked leaf prints

Another way you can preserve your garden and bring it indoors is to make leaf prints of botanicals that you've gathered from the garden. I'm going to make a set of herbal prints today because that seems like something that would be nice to hang in the kitchen. And I love working with herbs because they smell so good. You can go out and pick these fresh, for that matter. You can get them from the grocery store, but I find that sometimes once they're a little bit wilted, they'll reveal a little more texture on them. To start with prints, first of all, gather your herbs and make sure they don't have any dirt on them or bugs, anything that would transfer to the print itself. This mint is pretty wilted, but I think it could still make a really nice print because the veins are showing. You can print on either the front or the back of your leaf, but I find you're going to get the most detail on the side that has the most texture. So I'm going to remove these sage leaves so that they print independently. During the winter, I can do this with well evergreen herbs. In the fall, I'll gather fallen leaves can do kind of a fall theme. I love it when my grapevine makes nice prints with a little tendril going on them as well. I'm using archival inks, but I'm going to mix it up in some colours. We can invent our own colours of plants, so I lay the plant out. Only the parts that have ink on them, of course, are going to show up on our print, so kind of arrange it how you think you might want it on your finished paper. I'm using a soft scrap paper simply because it's a little bit of a cushion as I'm

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pressing down on the ink. I'll also use the same scrap paper to burnish it down. When I actually do the print on my drawing paper, the drawing paper that I'm using has a little bit of a warm colour, which is just kind of a little more organic touch to it, and it's a smooth drawing paper. Anything with a little bit of tooth to it would probably interrupt what the print looks like. So let's see what hot pink mint might look like. I like to go for more gestural impressions. I'm not trying to get a botanical print for all that. It is a botanical print. I mostly just want the personality, so I'm using my fingers to just burnish down feeling where the plant is underneath that and lift this up. Oh, that's kind of nice. I like that. So now let's do the sage is very dramatic. So let's going to do a purple sage. Purple sage. Isn't there a song called purple sage? And again, I'm pressing pretty hard because I want to get the ink down into the fine details of the leaf. Let's put this one kind of off to the side. You can either create your composition on your paper as you're doing your inking on your leaves, or you can cut them apart later and collage them together or however you want to use it. Nice. Let's do another one of those. You can use the same leaf over and over if you'd like, but it does get a little bit crushed when you are pressing as hard as I am on the plant. This one I'd like to have down here. As you're burnishing your plants and the ink, be aware of how much ink is transferring onto your scrap paper that you're using. You don't want to inadvertently get ink where it doesn't belong. I'll probably stop using that one. That's kind of got some nice movement to it. And then rosemary is a lovely one because it's got a lot of texture to it. So I'm going to go a little more traditional with the rosemary and see if I can't get a good print in green. So sometimes with the rosemary, because it is such a dimensional plant with the little needles all the way through, I might even take some of them off in the back. I want it to be able to lay straight, but you're inking the top. So that's what's going to get transferred to the paper. And while I'm sure the rosemary may not like it, it's a wonderful scent. It's like working with garden materials. You get to work with sound and sight and smell. Take that that and then transfer it and then try not to move it at all. Just go straight down from the top, kind of put your fingers up the sides of the stem as well as the stem. Make sure you get all of that ink and contact with the paper. So I think I'll do that one again. Maybe I'll do it in a different colour so I can kind of almost have an offset effect. That's the wrong end to that. I'm going to overlap it a little, but have it down. Oh, that's kind of a nice effect. It almost is just texture rather than reading as an actual plant. Whereas the sage leaf is very, very clear. Mint is kind of somewhere in between. I want to show you some samples I've done before using both dried plant material as well as fresh. This is another series of herbs that I did. So again, that sage that gets such a beautiful crisp image, the very, very textural rosemary. This is parsley, which looks so exotic when it's in blue there. And this is a dried lavender, which was delicious to smell while I was pressing it, but it kind of broke up. It didn't give me a lot of image on it, but I still liked it. It's very gestural. This is of a pressed pansy that I've had between the pages of a dictionary, and I liked how it kind of offset that double setting. So it's looking. And then for this one, I actually used a fresh pansy and felt bad about it because it absolutely destroyed the pansy. But it's a nice fun effect. Ferns will give you a beautiful image, something that, and with that, I would almost just want the fern on the page by itself. This is a beautiful maiden hair fern down here. Here's when I did some sage using a bunch little cluster of leaves. And then again, here are the pansies, dried and fresh. Nature is so rich in variety. There's so much you can use to make a print. Even a weed might make a beautiful print. So look around, pay attention when you're out on your walk or look through your garden or a friend's garden and see what you can gather to bring in to make a leaf print.

Threading botanicals

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I love finding new ways to bring botanicals and flowers from my garden indoors. A few years ago, I discovered this very simple way that I could simply thread the botanicals to create garlands and unusual arrangements. Threading botanicals is as simple as threading beads on a piece of string, so it's again, probably a good project to do with kids if they're able to handle a needle. So I'm going to cut a length. This is a wax twine. Wax twine is a little bit easier to work through the flower because you're actually going to pierce the flower. It's also much easier to thread on a needle, which I appreciate. We're going to make a garland that can either hang from one loop or it could be two loops, so you could swag it in a window or something. There's a loop. I've already cut these carnations from the tip of their stems, simply as easy as going in and getting them right at the base. Any scissors will do. I have some fine tip garden scissors that are snips. You can get in really close, but it's not that crucial. Then you simply start by putting your tapestry needle through the centre of the flower and trying to guide it at the other end. I go in from the front. You can do it from the other end. I find it easier. It's a little less resistance to do it this way. It doesn't have to be right spot on in the middle. This is a temporary adornment or for a dinner party, for an afternoon brunch for a little child's birthday party. The lastingness of your floral garden will depend on how sturdy your flour is. You could keep these in a refrigerator that would last at another day or so to their life. In the fall. People often string marigolds, which is a very traditional festival ornament in Mexico, and those tend to last very long time and even will dry in a way that you can hold them. I'm afraid carnations don't have quite the afterlife that marigolds do. You can go on with as many as you want and as long as you want. You can leave some space between the flowers, pull it all the way down. That loop will keep it from going anywhere, or you can stack them up. I always decide that at the end. It's fun. It's like when you were a little kid and you had those big wooden beads and you would string it on a piece of string and you thought you were a genius, or when you made macaroni necklaces for your mom for mother's day, this is kind of like that. Only you've graduated to carnations from macaroni. Okay, so here's our last one. You can also do it as a swag down the center of a table, you could make a lei for somebody. It's an easy way to display carnations, which are always available at the corner market, and it gives you this nice little garland. Another way you can thread your botanicals is on wire little individual florets. Hyacinths are an early spring bulb. They're fragrant. They have these beautiful colours, but they're sort of like stiff soldiers in the garden. I tend to like them in a container planting, but one of my favorite things to do with them is to string their florets. Kind of gives them a little bit more life and movement. So I take my garden shears or my scissors and just remove the florets from the flower. You don't need very much. Let's see if I can do this with some yellow ones too. Very spring-like colours. Okay, that's probably enough. This is more of a minimalist approach. So now I'm going to take a length of 20 gauge wire. This one happens to be silver. I like the kind of the glint of it, and what I'm doing is I'm creating a stem. The stem is going to be the wire stem, so you don't want it too long, but you want it to have enough play that you can actually put it down into the vase. I'm using this antique laboratory flask because it has a very narrow neck. A narrow neck is important because it will hold your stem in place. So using wire cutters, cut a length, you can always make it shorter after you're done, but you can't make it longer. So at the end, you're going to take your needle nose pliers and just make a little hook. That's just a way to make sure that your flower won't thread all the way off. Then I always have to kind of remind myself I want it to be like that, want it to end up so it's hooked at the end. So I'm going to thread this from the middle back through these hyacinth florets are a lot finer, a little more delicate than your carnations or marigolds or anything, but it's the same principle. You're just threading them on the wire, trying to hit the back of it, the back of the floret, and if you try not to handle it too very

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much, you'll find your flowers will last longer. They're just not used to being handled very much. This is very much handling, so you can see already this is a much different personality than the hyacinth on its own stem, but it's playful. And again, if you were doing a brunch or Mother's Day present or just something that you wanted to play with flowers. So once you have it to the length you want, straighten out the bottom, and then you can kind of always think a little more air in. These is a little more graceful, and that's really simple. You have one at each of the place settings on a special Easter brunch. That would be fun. Give it to a friend. It's just a different way to see your plants in the garden. Threading botanicals from your garden doesn't have to be limited to just spring or even summer, fall with marigolds. In the winter, I like to take leaves from my bay tree in the backyard. It's in constant need of pruning because it doesn't want to be the little lollipop that I want it to be, so I have a great deal of bay leaves that I can work with. You can also work with Manzanita leaves, holly leaves. I mean, that might be a little prickly, but to thread it simply in the same way, using a wire, make a hook at one end, connect it, and then thread all of your leaves on it, and then just crimp it into a circle at the end. This is a gift that I often give to friends. They will ask for it if I don't give it to them. It's a wonderful thing that they can have in their kitchen. You can use the bay leaves in stews and everything, but it's another beautiful seasonal expression of threading botanicals.

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