

Keeping a fragrant and fresh house

Contributed by Mrs Fiddlesticks

Are we bombarded with adverts for all these air fresheners? Things with plugs, things that squirt, sticks, gels and fans, a bewildering array. Are there alternatives? Natural ways to create a pleasant living environment? Of course and here are just a few suggestions to make your home smell lovely without synthetic fragrances or electricity!

First and foremost the best and cheapest way of freshening a stale room is to open a window! Let the sunshine in on a spring day, open windows on all sides of the house and let the fresh air go right through the building, banishing odours as it goes (to coin a marketing phrase).

There are of course times when you can't do that or when you want to scent your home rather than just freshen it. For imminent guests keep a plant mister filled with clean water and a few drops of your favourite essential oil, lavender would be nice, and give a quick squirt in the air as the door bell goes! A pan of water on the stove with a few cloves in it simmering away will also work. That's dealt with an immediate problem but its also possible to make things that smell nice, that will provide a more long-term solution to a fresh home.

They're easy, cheap and don't need much in the way of special ingredients. Here are some ideas:-

Sweet Powder & Recipe; (taken from Sloe Gin and Beeswax by Jane Newdick)

I've found this has a variety of uses. It's listed in the book as being suitable for filling small bags and putting amongst linen, which would be a lovely idea but I've also discovered that it makes a great base for potpourri that you can then add dried flowers etc to create a pretty and fragrant display.

You will need:

- 8 measures crushed coriander seeds (I did mine in a pestle and mortar but you could whiz them up in the food processor)
- 8 measures powdered orris root (a fixative to preserve the finished scent and a scented powder in its own right, this is available from some wholefood shops, places like Culpeppers or Foxes Spices (01789 266420) or even E-bay.
- 1 measure ground cinnamon
- 1 measure ground nutmeg
- 1 measure ground cloves
- ½ a measure white sugar
- 3 measures dried lavender flowers (available from www.daisygifts.co.uk, E-bay or your back garden!)

Mix everything together really well in a large bowl, pour in to a suitably sized kilner type jar and cover with the lid. Leave somewhere cool and dark for between 1 to 7 days to allow the perfumes to mix and fix. The longer you leave it the stronger the scent. Use the mixture to fill small muslin or cotton bags, perhaps adding a small piece of cotton wool impregnated with a favourite essential oil, a citrus one or rose for example.

I however chose to use this mixture as a base for a pot pourri (see top). I poured it in to a pretty glass vase and added dried hydrangea flowers from the garden and a sliced apple and orange that I'd slowly dried in a low oven, I then gently tossed it altogether, and sprinkled in some gold hearts birthday card confetti. It looks very pretty on the hearth. You could add whatever you had to hand, dried flowers (easy to do your own, just hang upside down from a hook in the airing cupboard) dried leaves, pine cones, cinnamon sticks, citrus peel (dried and cut). Use your imagination to create a pretty display.

For other recipes for pot pourri try Natural Housekeeping by Beverly Pagram or try this website <http://www.allthatwomenwant.com/potpourri.htm>

Perhaps you're nifty with a needle and thread - if so there are other uses for scented pot pourris. Many years ago I was given a padded fabric place mat; amongst its filling are hidden cloves and small pieces of cinnamon bark. I wish you could experience the scent when a warm apple pie is placed on it – scrumptious! It would be easy to make this yourself using pretty material and some quilters wadding (try and get the heat proof one suitable for making oven gloves and the like, so it protects your table, available from places like www.cottonpatch.co.uk) slipping the dried spices in to the centre. Obviously this item could only be sponged clean as the spices wouldn't survive the washing machine.

As a final project idea what about this chicken?

My partner's Mum, an expert patchworker, made me Mrs Wishbone as a doorstop. Due to her being posted to me she came as an empty chicken, but rather than have the poor thing filled with gravel I've stuffed her (chickens don't like that word on the whole!) with polyester toy filling and plenty of dried lavender flowers! She sits on the sofa and really scents the room when given a hug! You could add lavender to a cushion, slipping the flowers between cover and the pad.