



Carmen Johnston

# Front-Door Fresh

Herbs aren't just for cooking. Use them to dress up your entry this holiday season. **BY REBECCA BULL REED**

**C**armen Johnston knows how to make an entrance. No silk wreaths for this thirtysomething Thomaston, Georgia, designer. She is all about keeping it real. Carmen and husband Tommy have built

a business around introducing young and first-time gardeners to the rewards of getting their hands a little dirty. Their method is deceptively simple and is based on what she calls the three Ps: pretty, practical, and party. Here, the wreath is the pretty, the herbs are the practical, and a Thanksgiving gathering is the party. Follow her lead and she'll show you how to make herbs front-door chic and to grow your own fall wreath to complete the look.

## PLANT HERBS CARMEN'S WAY

**1 Invest in quality containers.** She loves using traditional iron pedestal urns for a formal entry or a single large terra-cotta pot for an informal one.

**2 Elevate herbs with a wire pot stand.** Carmen added a sphagnum moss pole basket (visit [topiaryartworks.com](http://topiaryartworks.com)) to each urn, creating multilevel planting areas for display.

**3 Fill both the container and the basket with soil.** Select a potting soil created specifically for containers. Moisten soil with water in a large bucket prior to adding soil to pots. Fill urn with soil first to steady pot stand.

**4 Plant with your favorite herbs, and use seasonal colors.** Carmen planted sage, oregano, thyme, parsley, bronze fennel, and rosemary. She then filled in bare spots with 'Dolce Creme Brulee' heucheras for color and added variegated ivy to trail over the sides. (TURN THE PAGE)

**LEFT:** Carmen used 'Dolce Creme Brulee' heucheras in the wreath and in the urns on either side of the door. Perfect for this project, they look like fall leaves.

PHOTOGRAPHS: RALPH ANDERSON

## CARMEN'S TIPS FOR GROWING HERBS

- **Give them lots of sun.** At least four to six hours every day.
- **Enrich the soil.** Select a good potting soil, and add earthworm castings or Cricket Krap ([gardencityorganics.com](http://gardencityorganics.com)).
- **Go bigger in fall.** Use 6-inch pots if you can to get a more finished look.
- **Keep soil moist but never wet.** Plants use less water in the cooler months.
- **Snip, snip, snip.** Clipping helps keep plants looking full.
- **Give a java jolt.** Dilute cold black coffee with an equal amount of water, and pour on herbs once a week to acidify the soil, making nutrient uptake easier. No cream or sugar, please! \*



Show off essential Thanksgiving herbs such as sage, thyme, and parsley.

## How To Make This Heuchera Wreath

Made with 'Dolce Creme Brulee' heuchera plugs, this living wreath fills in quickly to completely cover the form in seven to eight weeks.

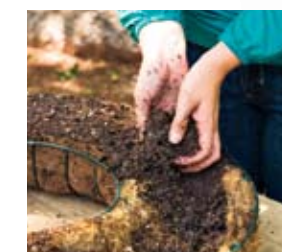


### SHOPPING LIST

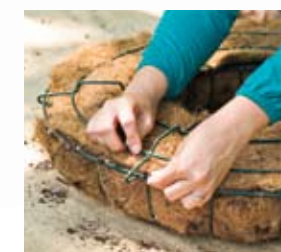
1. 24-INCH-DIAMETER LIVING-WREATH RING
2. PREPUNCHED LINER
3. POTTING SOIL
4. 28 'DOLCE CREME BRULEE' HEUCHERA PLUGS

### OR...

Order the complete kit by visiting [nectarandcompany.com](http://nectarandcompany.com).



**1** Line a 24-inch wreath ring with a prepunched coco-fiber liner, and fill with moist potting soil.



**2** Place the liner back on top of the soil, and clamp the metal wreath back in place. Now you are ready to flip the wreath over.



**3** Plant each opening with one heuchera plug, and water well with a wand. If you can't get plugs, use the smallest plants you can find—cell packs also work well.

## Growing Your Wreath

Place the wreath flat for two weeks in a sunny location to allow it to grow. Water twice a week with a watering wand, which is gentle on plants. Fertilize every other week with what Carmen calls "go-go juice" (a 20-10-20 water-soluble fertilizer). On the third week, hang it vertically on the door, and continue with the water and fertilizer schedule, removing dead leaves when you water. You can water the wreath on the door, but we suggest pulling it down and laying it flat to water.



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