

Have yourself a merry seashell Christmas

When Linda Powers lived in Ohio, she was like a lot of other northern residents in that she always put up a big, traditional, fresh Christmas tree.

“We even went to the woods to chop it down. I decorated it with traditional Christmas tree balls and ornaments, just like everyone else,” she recalls.

When she moved to Manasota Key in 2008, she stopped doing that traditional kind of tree.

“I wanted a Florida tree. I switched to a white artificial tree that I decorate with things that speak to the Florida lifestyle — like shells and flip-flops,” she says.

Most of Linda’s decorations are handmade from seashells she collected both here and on her many shelling trips.

“I call it my memory tree because each decoration is from a different shelling experience,” says Linda, who is president of the Englewood Shell Club.

When she puts each one on the tree, she says she takes pleasure in recalling where she got it.

Some shell decorations are special because of the friend who gave them to her. One that she especially treasures once belonged to Etta Crosby, a founding member of Englewood Shell Club.

Linda is also one of the few remaining club founders and now serves as president.

She is just one of many shell club members who make their own Christmas decorations from shells collected through the year.

One hallmark of the club is that members share ideas with each other and with the community at large.

Each year members gather at Cedar Creek Environmental Center to decorate the Christmas tree there. Every ornament is handmade from shells, most of which were collected on local beaches.

Bobbi Rodgers, who manages Cedar Point Environmental Center, says they love having the shell club decorate the tree because it brings visitors into the center.

“People really enjoy coming here to study the tree to gain some ideas they can try,” she says.

“I’m just amazed at all the creativity with shells,” she says.

During this year’s decorating session, several club members brought along their own seashell ornaments to share ideas.

Diane Herger displayed her shell-decorated Santa sled pulled by a seahorse, something that isn’t too easy to find.

“When red tide caused a fish kill in October, we had a bunch of seahorses wash up at our local beach. My son suggested it would be something different to have a seahorse pulling Santa’s sled,” she related.

Talk about a clever Florida interpretation of a traditional Christmas decoration.

Diane also made an angel by using a common oyster shell as a base.

“Common shells you find at Englewood beach work perfectly — even broken shells,” says the Englewood woman.

Susan Murray proved that to be true with her display of ornaments made from shells, beads and ribbons. The Port Charlotte woman turned a small plastic wreath into an attractive ornament by gluing coquina shells around it.

All it takes is patience and a bit of creativity.

It took a bit of time and patience for Rita Stonehouse and Joy Brandt to glue fragile jingle shells onto stands of yarn. But the result is an unusual garland on the shell club tree.

Want some ideas to make your own shell ornaments? Visit the Cedar Point Environmental Center to see what shell club members did with shells and imagination.

Or, if you want to learn more, the shell club is open to new members and craft classes are one of the popular activities.

For more information go to [www.inglewoodshell.club](http://www.inglewoodshell.club).

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**Linda Powers shows her clever miniature shell Christmas trees along with some of her favorite shell ornaments. At right is the shell club's Christmas tree with all handmade shell ornaments now on display at Cedar Point Environmental Center on Placida Road.**

**Linda Powers, Martha Dehne, Leslie Furmage, Linda Maggiore and Ginny LeBranche display clever wine collars made from ribbon and shells. No two collars are alike but all would make a stunning holiday gift.**

SUN PHOTOS BY PATTIE MIHALIK

**Look closely at Diane Herger's shell ornaments and you'll see a seahorse pulling Santa's sled along with a beach angel — all made with shells from Englewood Beach.**

**Susan Murray displays dozens of Christmas tree ornaments made from common shells found on area beaches.**

