



Make your own rustic grapevine tree

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
CHRISTINA LEVERE

If you aren't particularly crafty but aspire to make something for the holidays that turns out halfway decent, grapevine can be a great place to start, mainly because it's so forgiving. Unlike other materials, you can bend it, snap it, twist it and, if it doesn't come out the way you want, no one will know it is a redo.

Grapevine is relatively inexpensive (you can get 15 feet for roughly \$15) — even more so if you are lucky enough to have it growing in your backyard, like my grandmother did. I made my first grapevine tree with her, with vines harvested from her yard and soaked overnight in her tub. If you'd like to try your hand at one too, here are some easy steps to follow.

SUPPLIES

Wire tomato cage (choose one to suit the size tree you'd like to make)

Grapevine garland and/or wreaths from craft store, nursery or grapevine from yard

Florist wire, gloves, cutting shears

Tarp or broom if things get messy

Step 1

Gather your materials and head outside or into your garage. Making a grapevine tree isn't terribly messy, but there can be twigs and debris.



Step 2

If you're using natural grapevines from your yard, you'll want to soften them by soaking them overnight (or at least for a few hours) so they are more pliable. Submerge all of the vines in hot water in your sink or tub and make sure they remain that way. Let your family members know your plan ahead of time, so they aren't unpleasantly surprised when they try to take their morning shower, like my grandfather.

If you're using store-bought wreaths or garland, simply unfurl them.

Some people prefer tightly-wound grapevine trees; others, loose and haphazard. Whatever your taste, try to vary the thickness of your vines and avoid vines that are too old, stiff or difficult to work with. Working with grapevine involves a bit of wrestling; this is where gloves come in handy.

Step 3

Take your florist wire and wrap it around the tips of the tomato cage a few times so the ends stay together (it should look like a large cone).

Once you've unwrapped your wreaths and garland, start to wrap them around the tomato stand, using the thickest vines. They'll help keep your base sturdy. Start at the bottom (i.e., widest end) of the tomato stand and slowly work your way up, stopping to pull apart the grapevine to the thickness you desire.

To hold the grapevine in place, wrap your wire around the grapevine and stand. Remember, grapevine is forgiving so if you step back and don't like how it looks, unwrap and adjust.

Keep wrapping until you get to the top of the stand. Try to save the thinnest and most flexible pieces of grapevine for this task. You'll have an easier time filling in holes.

All set? Now is the time to get your wire and secure some of the vines into place. Wrap loosely, so your tree maintains its rustic charm. It's supposed to mimic nature, not look mummified.

If you like your grapevine trees extra fluffy, like I do, go around the stand a second time.



TIP

If your tree starts to collect debris from use and its vines look more gray than brown, cleaning it is simple. On a warm day, remove all the decorations from the tree and bring it outside. Using a baby bottle brush and gentle soap, clean the vines and rinse thoroughly with water. Let it dry completely before redecorating.



Step 4

Time to decorate! The beauty of a grapevine tree is that it looks good adorned with any and everything, from store-bought decorations to things gathered from nature (think acorns, dried flowers, evergreen clippings and moss). You can trim your tree with twinkling lights or berries, using small clips to keep everything in place, or simply leave it as is.

If you're looking for an elegant winter look, you can even spray paint the tree a different color, like white. To spray paint it, place it in a well-ventilated area or outdoors and apply your paint.

Lastly, don't feel you have to put your tree away after the holiday season is over. Try decorating it for different holidays. Hang miniature painted eggs on it for Easter, tiny pumpkins and fall leaves for Halloween. Adorn it with antique Valentine's or hearts for Valentine's Day. The possibilities truly are endless. My grandmother was a fan of hummingbirds, so she often decorated her trees with miniature hummingbird ornaments, small pieces of honeycomb and Queen Ann's lace.

My grandfather was much more appreciative of that.

Opposite page, clockwise: A grapevine tree with thick vines wrapped once around a homemade base of wire and twigs. The tree with another round of vines and wreaths. This page, top: The tree decorated with acorn garland. Below: The grapevine tree lit and ready for the season.

