

A Boxwood Wreath to Call Your Own

By Jo Anna Natale, Fairfax Master Gardener

Years ago, when I was a brand-new mom, a friend invited me to a boxwood wreath-making workshop to give me a baby break. I've been attending that workshop every December since. For me, making a fresh boxwood wreath not only signals the start of the holiday season, it gives my gardener-hands a chance to dive into greenery one more time before their long winter rest.

Can't make it to a workshop? No worries. If you have a backyard boxwood bush gone bonkers, or if you can buy fresh boxwood boughs at the garden store, you can make a festive, inexpensive, boxwood wreath in a few hours. Unlike some wreaths in which greenery is wired to a dry base, the boxwood in this wreath is set into moist moss. Consequently, you can easily keep this one hanging outside until February (or until your neighbors complain).



You will need:

- 12" wire wreath frame (larger, if you're going for grand), available online or at craft stores. Look for a frame that is slightly rounded.
- green, plastic wreath wrap—3" width, available through Amazon or a floral supply store
- sphagnum moss, available at home and garden centers. A 12"-diameter wreath will require about 4 liters.
- bucket
- pruners
- rubber gloves
- small knife or floral pick
- floral pin
- floral wire, heavy-gauge wire, or a couple of pipe cleaners
- boxwood clippings, either pruned from your own bushes or purchased
- ribbons, additional greenery, pinecones, nuts—whatever appeals

To begin, soak the sphagnum moss in a bucket of water for at least an hour, so its fibers saturate. While waiting, cover a table with plastic sheeting, and place the wreath frame, open side up, on the table. Then, wearing rubber gloves (the moss can irritate skin), scoop up handfuls of the wet moss. Squeeze out excess moisture, and stuff the frame generously with moss, mounding it as you go. Aim to keep the same plumpness throughout, as if you are sculpting a well-raised donut.



Once the frame is nicely filled, tie one end of the wreath wrap (still on the roll) onto the back of the frame. Begin winding the wrap around the frame, passing the roll in and out of the frame's center and overlapping the wrap's edges just slightly as you go. You want to contain the moss fully. When you've reached your starting point, cut the wrap from the roll, and attach the end with a pin on the wreath's underside.



Now it's time for boxwood. Almost any type will work. From my yard, wrapped I clipped both Winter Gem (*buxus microphylla* var. *japonica* "Winter Gem") and Franklin's Gem (*Buxus sinica* var. *insularis* "Franklin's Gem"). The Winter Gem has waxy leaves and tips that fan out. Franklin's Gem has small, delicate leaves that densely cover its branches. My bushes were overdue for pruning, so I quickly filled a kitchen garbage bag with clippings — more than enough for one wreath. I rinsed the boxwood to free it from any creatures. (If you buy boxwood, soak it overnight to revive it.)



Back at your workspace, use pruners to cut boxwood pieces no longer than 3 or 4 inches. Choose sprigs that are full, not skimpy. Then, using a small knife or a floral pick, poke a hole in the wrapped wreath base, and slide a sprig in at a 30-degree angle. Continuing to insert pieces at this angle will ensure that your wreath looks lush, not insane. Since I was combining two boxwood types, I opted to use Winter Gem as the base layer, closest to the frame, and top it with Franklin's Gem, which handily covered gaps.



Continue working in the same direction, all around the wreath, until you end where you began. Fill in any gaps as necessary with additional sprigs. If you've lost the center hole in your wreath, do a little pruning to make it reappear.

Next, hold your wreath in front of you to determine where the top should be. Use wire or a pipe cleaner to fashion a loop to hang your wreath. Attach this to the back of the frame, at the top, making sure the hanging mechanism is secure and will hold the wreath's weight.

Hang the wreath unadorned, in its most natural form; or let your inner artist take over, adding different kinds of greenery or other embellishments to the boxwood base. In the past, I have used holly, nandina berries, heather, lady apples, cedar and fir sprigs, or clove-studded lemons, depending on my mood. If you like, attach a fabric bow (using floral wire as a fastener) that matches your holiday decor or your front door.



Occasionally spritzing your wreath with water will help keep it perky, but this isn't mandatory, as the moss will stay moist for a while. I've left my wreath up until Valentine's Day, still looking good.

Whenever you do take it down, don't toss it. Remove any decorations, pull out and put the boxwood sprigs in the trash (to prevent Boxwood Blight), and then store the still-wrapped wreath base in the basement or garage. Next December, soak the base in a laundry sink filled with water, and then hang it up for a day to let excess water drip out. Prune your boxwood anew — you know it will need it — and begin again. Can't wait until winter? Presoak the frame in summer and cover it with herbs or hydrangea blooms. Beautiful.

