

Traditional Decorations

Evergreen is a symbol of life and is taken from the old midwinter festival which encourages the return of sun which is another reason why we often use holly, mistletoe and ivy to decorate our houses.



Holly

Mistletoe

Ivy

Ancient people were fascinated by the way evergreens stayed green through all the bleak days of winter. It proved to them that these trees were still alive and reminded them that spring would come again.

Mistletoe

The Druids, who lived in Britain in pre-Christian times, are responsible for the use of mistletoe at Christmas. They worshipped the oak tree and as mistletoe grew on oak trees they regarded it as a very special plant and thought it possessed magical qualities that kept the sleeping oak alive during the cold winter days. They believed chopping down an oak tree covered in mistletoe promised death to the woodcutter within the year.

Kissing under the Mistletoe

The Druids dedicated mistletoe to the Goddess of Love, which explains the kissing that goes on under it. Originally, when a boy kissed a girl, he plucked a berry from the cluster and presented it to her. When the berries were gone, so were the kisses.

A traditional rhyme about mistletoe is:

*'Pick a berry off the mistletoe
For every kiss that's given.*

*When the berries have all gone
There's an end to kissing.'*

Victorians bound the mistletoe to a frame to make a "kissing ring." Each time a gentleman caught a lady under the mistletoe, he was allowed to claim a kiss.

Holly

The Holly, from ancient times, was used by people in Britain to protect their homes from evil spirits. Witches and warlocks, are said to be deterred from entering by the holly's prickly leaves and also by its reputation for holiness (the word "holly" comes from holy).

It is bad luck to bring holly or ivy into the house before 24 December.