

# The Oregonian

## Natural twist

**Anne Ryan scours produce departments and even hardware stores to create her floral displays**

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**Kym Pokorny**  
**The Oregonian**

Y ou know what it's like to meet someone who can do it all -- and do it with flair?

Anne Ryan is like that. She owns a thriving floral business and just published a gorgeous book. She runs from book signing to demo to publicity gig with unflappable calmness; cancels a carpool, showing only mild discomfort. Married and the mother of three sons, the youngest an infant, she complains about having to lose the last of her postpartum poundage, but looks fabulous.

She'd scoff, but we're thinking Ryan is perfect.

And after taking one look at her self-published book, "Design on a Lime: Flowers With a Twist," we're not just thinking it, we know it.

Just to get it out of the way, here's a short resume, not as impressive as Ryan herself, but quirky in a how-did-she-end-up-here kind of way: Ryan grew up in Davis, Calif., and got a communications degree from Loyola Marymount University. The first part of her career was selling racing components for the mountain bike world; the second, selling parts for pallet jacks (don't ask; just know it was a big deal). In both jobs, she did plenty of travel.

Portland's been home since 1993. Once she got married, she decided to give in to a lifetime yearning to do something creative. She went to "flower school" as she calls it, but didn't want to work in a shop. So in 1999, the same year her first son was born, she started a floral design business, working from home.

Here's some of what she has to say for herself.

Q: Describe your style. A: Elegant with a twist. My design looks very simple but isn't necessarily easy to come up with. Overall, it's understated. I use natural items to give it a twist. The less someone thinks of it as being used in an arrangement, the more I'm inclined to use it. Q: How do you get your ideas? A: It helps when I have guidelines. That limits what I can use. Then I go to the store and stare at the produce. I have to consider what will last out of the refrigerator. I think of color and shapes. For the photo shoot today, I went to three high-end produce departments and really scoured. I drive the produce people crazy because I'm not a produce expert, so I ask a ton of questions.

Of course, other people give totally different parameters, and that might lead me to the hardware store or the paint store. I comb the aisles at Lowe's and Home Depot and local hardware stores, looking for pipes and connectors, which are often holding flowers or produce or painted and used as part of the arrangement and people don't know what they're looking at.

I'm very visual. I get little inspiration until I get to the store, and then it comes together very quickly.

I also get ideas from nurseries and from nature itself. As an example, my kids stopped to play at a pond near our house, and I started studying a waterlily or lotus leaf. It looked like fun to use it as a platform to have something coming out of it. Q: What are some of your favorite materials to work with? A: All the various berries available in the garden and floral shops; produce; unusual, funky pods, thistles, things no one else wants. Q: What about colors? A: I try to use colors that don't overshadow each other. I try to do it so people can see each flower or vegetable or fruit in the arrangement. My style has more of an architectural bent, which tends to make each element stand out more. And it tends to separate colors more. Q: As a busy wife and mother, how do you do it? A: I don't sleep. The most important thing, since I work at home, I divide my time with the kids from time working. I'm good at it. With the floral business, I know my

limits. I only take one or two large events a month. One month, I turned down 30 weddings. (Right now, Ryan is concentrating on promoting her book and not taking floral jobs.) It's all about setting limits and trying to stick with them.

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#### TIPS FROM ANNE RYAN

If there was only one tip I could give, it would be to strip the leaves off the stems that go into water. It gives a clean look and makes the arrangement last longer.

A tip my floral teacher told me: You don't need to use all your materials. Stop when it looks good.

To hold flowers up in a vase (rather than lean against the edge), create a grid across the top of the vase with chicken wire or clear, waterproof floral tape. For solid containers, cut a piece of chicken wire larger than the top and tuck edges down into vase. Use tape for clear vases.

You've heard it before: Re-cut the ends of flowers (a minimum of 1 inch) just before placing them in water. Cut at an angle so the stem doesn't sit flush against the bottom of the vase.

Add fresh water daily.

HOW TO GET THE BOOK "Design on a Lime," by Anne Ryan with photos by Kristie Coia, self-published under the name Feld Press, \$27.50, is available online at [www.designonalime.com](http://www.designonalime.com) or at many bookstores, gift shops, and home and garden shops throughout Oregon and Washington.

#### UPCOMING APPEARANCES

Book signing at Bite of Zupan's, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 11, Heathman Hotel, 1001 S.W. Broadway.

Holiday Floral Design with Anne Ryan, demonstration, 1 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 10, Portland Nursery, 5050 S.E. Stark St.

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## HOW-TO

# HOLIDAY TREE

For a whimsical Christmas decoration, Anne Ryan shows how to put together a quick-and-easy laurel tree hung with radishes and berries for ornaments. For a centerpiece, make several and run them down the middle of the table.



**Project time:** 90 minutes

### MATERIALS

- ◆ 1 12-inch Styrofoam cone
- ◆ 1 Styrofoam block
- ◆ 1 small terra-cotta pot
- ◆ Straight green floral wire
- ◆ 1 boutonniere pin (has bead at the end)
- ◆ 1 bag dried split green peas
- ◆ 1 6-inch-long branch (she used birch)
- ◆ Floral glue (or hot glue gun)
- ◆ About 16 large laurel leaves (wipe with damp cloth and a little vegetable oil)
- ◆ Radishes (polish with vegetable oil)
- ◆ Green *Hypericum* berries
- ◆ White snowberries

## ASSEMBLY



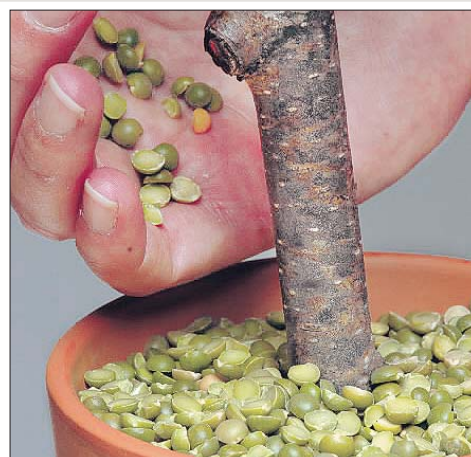
- ◆ Cut six pieces of wire, as long as you wish, allowing enough to stick into cone. Make a small hook on the end of a wire. Thread on, in order, one radish, one green *Hypericum* berry and one snowberry. Push radish down onto hook to hold in place. Bend top of wire 90 degrees. Push into bottom edge of cone. Repeat with remaining five pieces of wire. Rest cone on a glass or cup as you work to keep hanging ornaments from bending.



- ◆ Starting at the bottom of the cone, glue laurel leaves on, overlapping and layering as you go. Ryan prefers floral glue (available at craft stores) if you can find it. A glue gun will cause the leaves to brown fairly quickly, but would be OK if you're going to use the tree for just one night.



- ◆ Stuff pot with Styrofoam block, shaving edges to make it fit and using shavings to make it stable. With an apple corer (Ryan's favorite tool), make a hole in the center of the cone, pour in some glue and stick in the branch. Do the same to the Styrofoam in the pot.



- ◆ Use a piece of wire with a hook on the end to stick a radish snugly onto top of tree. On the boutonniere pin, thread, in order, a snowberry, *Hypericum* berry and cranberry. Stick into radish. Pour split peas into pot until Styrofoam is completely hidden.

PHOTOS BY MARV BONDAROWICZ/THE OREGONIAN