

Pining for Beauty

Craftsman Michael Pappa incorporates pine cones and other natural materials into his one-of-a-kind rustic creations.

Natural inspiration isn't what most people find in Jersey City, New Jersey, a major urban area only 15 miles from lower Manhattan with a population of nearly a quarter million. But most people walking the streets of this bustling town aren't looking at it with an artist's eye. Michael Pappa, however, sees the inherent beauty found in the town's many parks and natural areas and has created a way to turn nature's castoffs into striking works of art.

Growing up in Wheeling, West Virginia, Pappa had an abundance of natural materials with which to craft his childhood projects, but his interest in homespun artistry didn't really develop until he took an Appalachian crafts class as part of his art degree. But it was only after he was laid off from his job as

a proofreader at a law firm in New York that he reconnected with his art school lessons. Feeling that beauty can be found around every corner, and that art can be made inexpensively, Pappa remembered a pine cone wreath he had created for his father years before and realized that making similar creations would be a great way to combine his love for art and the outdoors.

Gathering many of his elements from a park near the Holland Tunnel, Pappa also collects pine cones from other states for use in his wreaths, garlands and other decorative ornaments. He often accents his creations with seedpods, acorns, dried flowers, nuts, whole spices and other natural materials found in his travels as well as in New York's extensive Flower District. Because fallen pine cones are in their most stable state in the winter months,



Pappa uses his collecting trips during January, February and March as a reason to spend time outside all year-round. He's also had friends and customers bring him pine cones from out of state.

"People see this kind of thing as a fall or holiday item, but for people who live in a more rural or rustic setting, they can be used year-round," says Pappa. Indeed, the natural materials and earth tones artfully arranged in his designs look spectacular no matter the season, indoors or out.

Pappa does note that, although he coats his works with a clear acrylic spray to protect them from the elements, the cones may open up if left in direct contact with rain. He also suggests keeping the decorations inside if the area is prone to squirrels, who tend to enjoy his creations as well.

Prices range from \$50 to \$115 for wreaths and \$35 to \$50 for garlands. Ornaments come in a set of five for \$25. **CBC**



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