



Gilded Age Christmas Crafts at The Mark Twain House & Museum

Cranberry Popcorn Garland

Like many families during the holidays, the Clemenses would have decorated their home and Christmas tree with hand-made and edible decorations. German immigrants and German-Americans popularized not only the tradition of the Christmas tree, but also the usage of popcorn garland during the Christmas season. Cranberries became traditional ingredients in popcorn garland in the 1800's in America. Their festive red color and long shelf life made them ideal for decorating.

While the Clemenses would have made their popcorn garland and decorated their tree on Christmas Eve, and would have likely snacked on their ingredients as well, we recommend enjoying your garland strictly as a decoration. If you would like your garland to be enjoyed as an edible treat, you can use it as decoration outside, and let us know what creatures come to visit and enjoy it!

Here's what you'll need! If you've purchased a craft box from the museum, the bolded supplies are included.

- **Popcorn** 1 tablespoon of unpopped popcorn makes enough popped popcorn for 3 feet of garland. Craft boxes contain 3 tablespoons of unpopped popcorn.
- **Red beads**, pompoms, or fresh cranberries. Craft boxes contain enough beads to place one every six inches or so.
- **Thread** Even though it's popcorn, this garland can get heavy, so it's best to string it in 3-foot lengths. Craft boxes contain 10 feet of white thread, enough to make three 3-foot garlands with a bit of thread to spare for knotting.
- **Needle** A sharp needle is fine, but a semi-blunt tapestry needle like the one included in the craft box is a bit safer
- **White buttons** Popcorn can easily slip off the end of the thread, even if you've knotted it, so your garland will be a bit more stable if you begin and end each length with a spare button or bead. Craft boxes contain 6 white buttons, enough for three 3-foot garlands.
- Newspaper/paper towel/washable tablecloth--if you're subbing in real cranberries!

Instructions:

1. **Start by making your popcorn.** For garlands, it's better to do this without oil. One of the easiest ways is to pop it in the microwave in a large microwave-safe bowl with a plate on top. Spread the popped popcorn out on baking sheets or a paper towel-covered counter to let the popcorn cool all the way before you start; it will be less fragile this way.
2. **Get your thread ready.** If you've got a museum craft box, cut the white thread in thirds; if you're working from your own supplies, cut a 3.5 foot length of thread for each 3 foot garland you're making. Thread your needle and tie a knot at one end of your string. If you have buttons, thread one of those first, then go back and forth through the holes a few times to fix it firmly on the end.
3. **Start threading your popcorn!** Thread a piece of popcorn and push it all the way to the end to test your knot. Then thread three pieces of popcorn and push them down. It saves time to push a bunch, rather than one-by-one, but I found that if you try to push more than 3 popcorn kernels, they break more easily!
4. **Add a red bead every 6 inches or so.** If you have more beads or pompoms of your own—or even real cranberries!—feel free to add those in and make your garland extra-special.
5. **Add another button after your last piece of popcorn,** run the needle back and forth through the holes a couple of times, and tie a knot to secure it.
6. **After you've finished each of your garlands,** hang them on the mantelpiece or tree!

Remember: the popcorn is no longer edible!