Spotlight on Middlebury

Nature inspires crafts

By JANINE SULLIVAN–WILEY

December is a great month to collect natural materials, step down the pace and make something – maybe a gift or a holiday decoration. Some general ideas to get you started are listed below. Detailed instructional videos for many of these and related crafts are available online.

Pine cones are a versatile natural material. They can be painted on the tips and used as tree ornaments, collected with ribbon and a bow as a wall hanging, made into mini Christmas trees or reindeer, or soaked with wax (from candle remnants) to use as fire starters. An easy way to paint the tips is to put the paint (or glue for sparkles) on a sponge and then dab the cone onto the sponge instead of dabbing the sponge onto the cone with a brush. Attach hangers or ribbons quickly with a glue gun.

Acorns are plentiful this year. The big ones are the best. Their little caps make acorns a natural for turning them into tiny faces. One artist takes this to an incredible level. Find him at www.davidmbird.com. Even with just a face painted on and a ribbon glued to the top, acorns make adorable tiny ornaments. With the bottom part painted gold or silver, and a fancy ribbon attached, they make a nice alternate to a bow on a small package.



The author created this planter using a purchased evergreen wreath and adding red-twig dogwood branches and evergreens and holly pruned from bushes in her yard. She times pruning the evergreens so it coincides with this annual activity. (Janine Sullivan-Wiley photo)

Speaking of tiny, when walking in your yard or on trails, kids often find the crooks of roots or holes near the base of trees fascinating. That is a great opportunity for kids (or kids at heart) to use more natural materials to make that spot into a fairy house. Add a bridge and tiny trails and you have the makings of a fairy village. (As long as it's not destroying anything, or adding artificial materials, there's no reason you can't do this on a MLT trail, too.)

It's easy to make centerpieces or planters with branches. My favorite is to purchase a simple evergreen wreath with a bow (lots of sales on them in December), and add cut evergreen branches and tall accent branches such as red twig dogwood for an easy and long-lasting winter planter. Two tips: if you plan to use your existing planter with its now-dead flowers, put it in a protected spot for the dirt to thaw out. It's hard to push branches into frozen dirt! And if you don't have access to red twig dogwood branches, you can use regular branches spray painted red or white.

Bittersweet vines are awful invasive plants. Do the environment some good: cut them down, remove and destroy or throw out the berries, and the supple vines are great for making wreaths. Just make sure they're not poison ivy, which usually has hairy aerial roots that attach it to the tree it climbs.

A large branch or small log – especially white birch – can be used to make a lovely candle holder. Cut to a suitable length, trim to flatten a bottom, then use a hole saw or a Forstner router bit to drill out a space for tea lights or regular candles.

An oldie but goodie is stringing popcorn or cranberries to make a garland for the tree. Afterwards, this can be put outside as a treat for the birds.

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Pomperaug Warrriors have a lot to smile about. They've won their third consecutive championship. (Tonia Walsh, Joy Life Art Photography photo)

Warriors win championship

SOUTHBURY – The Pomperaug Warriors seventh grade football team won its third consecutive championship on Nov. 14, defeating Newtown 41-12 at Lyman Hall High School in Wallingford. The victory extends the team's winning streak to 30 straight games, a run that began in the third week of the 2024 season.

Team members have played together since second and third grade and posted a winning record every year. In 2024, when the boys were in fifth grade, everything changed. After a losses to Newtown and Monroe, the Warriors have since won every game.

They earned their first title in 2024 by defeating Monroe 7-0, then repeated in 2025 with a 28-0 shutout of Newtown. This season, they beat Newton again, 41-12, for a three-peat.

"The semifinal against Newtown, at Newtown, is when it all clicked," said head coach Jerry Attanasio. "The boys ran the hammer offense to perfection. Long, punishing drives that wore Newtown down."

The Warriors went 8-0 in the 2026 regular season, scoring 262 points and allowing just 15. Both marks led the 15-team seventh grade division, and no other team held opponents under 59 points. Six of their eight games were shutouts, and the defense allowed no scores for six straight weeks.

Head coach Jerry Attanasio and his brother, assistant coach Tom Attanasio, played high school football together under Chuck Drury and teach his "team first" culture and "Deeds, not words" attitude. Tom doesn't have a child in the program. He volunteers his time to coach the offensive line.

"We want these kids to play the way we were taught to play," said Jerry Attanasio. "Team first. Deeds, not words."

Michela Solanch, who took over as president of Pomperaug Warriors Football & Cheer last year, has made aligning with the high school a priority. The board worked with Pomperaug High School head coach Tony Pereira and Jerry Attanasio, who is also an assistant coach at the high school, to align the youth football and cheer programs with the high school teams and build a true feeder program. The seventh grade Warriors now run the same flexbone triple option offense as Pomperaug High School, with the same playbook, terminology, and blocking schemes. They are the first youth group to fully adopt the high school playbook.

"If we can start them young at the youth level, it brings so much value to the staff and schools at the high school level," said Solanch.

By the time these players reach high school, they will have two years of experience in the offense run by Pomperaug High School offensive coach Ryan Swift.

Team members are: Austin Sullivan, Brad Lombardo, Clive Nichols, Cooper Pace, Declan Georgette, Enzo Cavallo, Jackson Walsh, Jacob Federowicz, Joseph Kinsella, Luke Hoadley, Matteo D'Occhio, Max Null, Nico Cordero, Noah Odenwaelder, Patrick Flaherty, Preston Ney, William Solanch, and Paul Attanasio.

"This is a great group of kids who work extremely hard and are dedicated to each other," said Jerry Attanasio. "There's no doubt that bond will carry them through high school. They're going to be a force to be reckoned with."

Established in 1973, the Pomperaug Warriors Football and Cheer is a member of American Youth Football in the Shoreline Division. It operates as an independent nonprofit organization serving Southbury and Middlebury, and receives no funding from Region 15.

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Saturday, Dec. 5
4 pm - Tree Lighting on the Green: Enjoy free hot chocolate. Church youth will sell their handmade shell ornaments/trinket dishes.
Sunday, Dec. 13
10 am - Annual Christmas Pageant (during worship). Nursery care available.
Monday, Dec. 21
7 pm - Longest Night Service: The Christmas season can be a time of mixed emotions. Join us for a quiet time of relection, comfort and connection as we make space for the hope of Christmas.
Thursday, Dec. 24
5 pm - Candlelit Christmas Eve Family Service
10 pm - Candlelit Christmas Eve Communion Service
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