

## IT'S ALL ARRANGED

**Photo:** Glowing candles fill the center of the arrangement of fresh vegetables, fruits and herbs. The centerpiece was created by Gail Arnold, owner of Topiaries at the Beach.

Candles make a cheery contrast to autumn's lengthening nights. Clustered in a centerpiece, they light a dinner table with intimacy and warmth, offering an inducement to linger. But don't stop there. If you are looking for a fresh way to dress the table during the change of seasons, add some flowers, feathers, fruit and even vegetables to an arrangement. Arnold favors a relaxed, natural look in her arrangements. Gail Arnold owner of Topiaries at the Beach, did just that in creating a centerpiece anybody could try on their own, while creating Arnold passed on a wealth of tips. "Varied heights and color tones create an interesting and pleasing effect," Arnold explained, selecting five pillar candles to fill the center of a circular wreath form as she demonstrated her art. "I don't believe in symmetrical," she added. Arnold began by placing a 15 inch-diameter ring of oasis floral foam on a plastic tray. The tray will protect the table top from water saturation. A clay azalea pot upside down and topped with a saucer, goes into the ring to elevate the candles well above the plant material. A garland of feathers laid around the perimeter of the tray anchored the arrangement visually with a fringe of rich browns. "I've been using feathers in arrangements for several years and I love the look", said the California native who studied design and worked as a florist in San Diego, winning several design competitions, before moving to Virginia Beach in 1988. Seven years ago Arnold opened Topiaries, corner of 25th and Pacific. Topiaries specializes in dried, preserved, and silk flowers which Arnold enthusiastically arranges. "I can't wait to get into the shop everyday and start playing". She said and laughed. "I have fun and people love what I design. How could I improve on that?". As she continued her arrangement, she used scented geranium leaves, mint stems and strand of ivy to make a background of greens. I prefer to hide the wreath form with foliage instead of sheet moss. Moss will absorb the water from the oasis and then wet the table, Arnold explained as she began to add fruit and vegetables. Stems of green and red grapes were wired to 2-inch wooden picks and secured in the foam. Small bunches of picture perfect asparagus spears and green beans were tied with raffia. The bunches can be laid in place or stood on the end of the arrangement. "I believe in having a different view for every guest," said Arnold as she clustered some variegated leaves to the back of the arrangement and added several silk dragonflies. "It's almost like a little treat for each guest at the table. Hydrangea flowers, some still showing color and others completely dry, added fullness and form to the arrangement. Single alstroemeria blooms were tucked in among the foliage while bright red currants and kumquats added intense dashes of seasonal color. "The trick is to keep the wreath low and close without making it tight," Arnold cautioned. Adding depth by thinking in terms of ins and outs, highs and lows. Keep little flowers high and big flowers low. "Roses and freesia would work just as well as the hydrangeas and alstroemeria. Or you could use just fruits and vegetables and eliminate flowers all together. Pine cones, evergreen and berries from your yard would make a lovely December arrangement. With different materials, the basic design will work for every season."

Ann Wright free-lance writer

