

# Natural creations

By SALLY PFAEFFLIN

What can be done with bittersweet?

The graceful, twisted vines, laden with inedible yellow and orange fruit which burst open to reveal a crimson seed, have long been hailed as a favorite for fall decorations. If the plant is picked early, before the fruit bursts, the fruit and seed will remain intact through the winter.

Most nurseries sell fruit-laden bittersweet branches during the Fall season, along with pumpkins, Indian corn and Japanese lanterns.

A few decades ago, it was difficult to find areas where bittersweet grew locally. In recent years, however, the vine, also known as *Celastrus Scandens*, can be found in abundance in rural Connecticut, randomly growing over fences, trees and anything the vine attaches to. Though a joy to decorators, it has been looked upon as a curse to landowners, who say once you have it, it is almost impossible to get rid of it.

According to the "Encyclopedia Americana," bittersweet is indigenous to an area from Eastern Canada to South Dakota and southward. The encyclopedia also explains that the name comes from the fact that the twigs and branches have a

taste that is at first sweet, than bitter.

Tina Puckett of Branch Road has discovered that the vine minus the fruit, plus talent can equal money. But only in recent years has Tina found a profitable use for bittersweet.

After spending most of her childhood in South America, Tina moved with her family to the United States in time to enter Westport High School. During those years the family spent summers at Bantam Lake, and she became acquainted with the area.

About ten years ago, Tina enrolled in an adult education class on basket weaving offered at the Forman School in Litchfield.

After attending the two Saturday morning sessions where she learned all kinds of weaving, Tina began practicing her craft by making Christmas gifts for everyone on her list. The gifts were all so well-received Tina's parents suggested she might try making some of these gifts to sell.

Her early baskets were sold in boutiques and specialty food stores around Litchfield County, as well as a store in Boston.

With a background in creativity gained through studying set design at Utica College, Tina

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