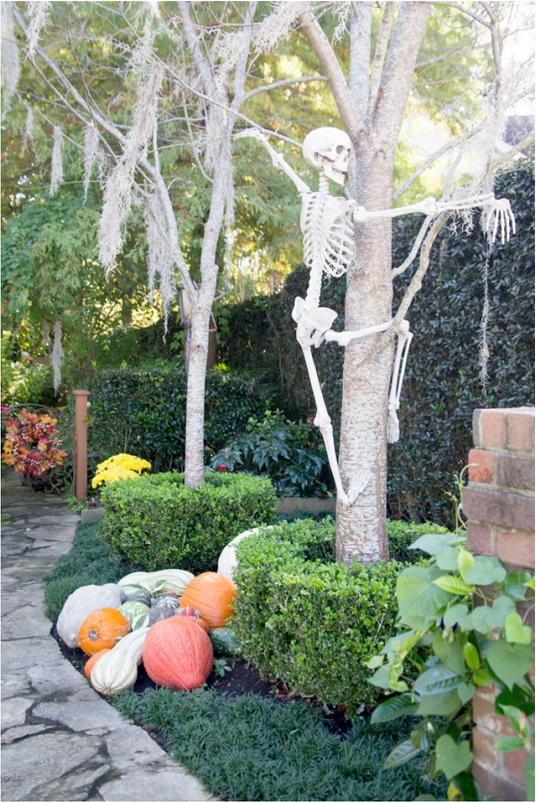


Living the Good Life with Chris H. Olsen: Down to the Bones



Did you know that Halloween is now becoming the top holiday for spending on decorations? Even exceeding Christmas. You have a lot of competition out there, so you might just need to up your game. We all know about creating a bit of interior spookiness, but, if you have a walk and a bit of green space, you can create shivers at the curb.

You won't need to hire a grave robber to find you some bones. Lots of really good (read: lifelike) skeletons are now available, and they're not limited to humans, either. A great way to display a skeleton, since we've all seen them hanging at eye level, is to elevate it a bit and maybe splay it out. Spread out the arms and legs, as if it were tossed by something not quite human, and wire to a tree trunk, so that the head is just above your gaze.



If you don't have any slim trees in your yard like these birches, you could attach your skeleton to a wall, even, or to corner of the house. The idea is to bring it up higher to maximize the effect, and don't just leave it relaxed and standing, as if it were hanging in an anatomy lab. And a pile of bones is also a great way to add a further element to your design. You don't always have to use a complete skeleton.

And you might also like using animal skeletons as well. What's great about these dogs is that they fit the scale of decorations along a walk. Visitors can't miss them, and they're unexpected. You might need to assure guests that, no, that's not the skeleton of your retriever.





If you use pumpkins, really use them. One or two will never be enough. And don't just line them up, either. Create a feeling of bounty and texture by creating drifts of pumpkins along a walk, or on a porch. Also, a great way to use them is mix real with artificial. It's also a good idea to mix varieties of pumpkins. Avoid using nothing but the traditional orange. You'll find stripes and all sorts of hues, plus the great 'Ghost' pumpkins, with a pallor that will punctuate your design, and echo the skeleton's whiteness.

You'll find many fake pumpkins already 'carved' as jack o' lanterns, and you can mix them in. One trick I have for making them a bit more lifelike—and even elegant—is to stain them. Take a cloth dip it into walnut stain, and wipe the entire pumpkin and stem. This action calls for a light touch; you don't want a pumpkin that's too dark.



Once you've achieved your mix of pumpkins, add mums. They'll provide a shot of color to your display. When the holiday is over, you can simply plant the mums. Another advantage they have is that they also pick up the light, which is crucial since many of your guests will see your handiwork only at night.

And speaking of lighting, if you have it, use it, or even create it. The light tubes here were once PVC pipes that were drilled with random holes and then filled with strings of white lights. Just bury them and display your bones and pumpkins around this bit of impromptu light. I sprayed the tubes orange for the occasion, and I like the effect so much, I leave the lights on during the day.



Once your skeleton is hung, you might need a bit more texture, since you're bringing your guests' eyes up into the trees. Instead of using the nylon cobwebs, try Spanish moss. And you won't have to get in the car and drive to the coast to get it. You can pick up packaged moss at Botanica Gardens, and it creates a nice decrepit effect.

Once you have your large pieces in, step back, appraise your work, and add elements as needed. Then add some more.

Pumpkins, jack o' lanterns, mums, and seasonal bits like bunches of bittersweet, which you can place in groupings on the ground, and in pots along the entryway, will mean you're really enjoying a 'haunted' life. Just the right thing for the season.