



Beth Parks collected crab claws, scallop shells and other material from her beach and transformed them into elegant Christmas ornaments. (NEWS Photos by Karen Pominville)

HOLIDAY

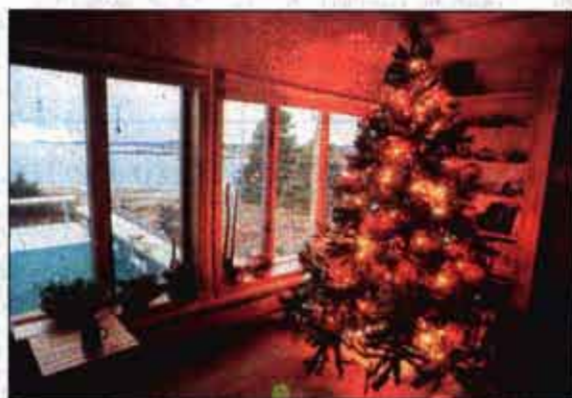
Shells give Christmas tree a taste of the sea

TREASURE



Beth Parks, a wildlife biologist and educator at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service, sees beauty in things tossed up by the sea.

*Biologist
finds riches
along coast
of Maine*



If the Little Mermaid had a Christmas tree, it would look exactly like the one lit up in Beth Parks' Down East home today. Cast in shades of silver and gold, scallop shells, sea urchins, crab claws, coral and seaweed dangle from the branches of a tree that looks as if it were swept from the ocean floor.

While walking her dog along the shore, Parks collected material that washed up on the beach. She took it home, washed it, dried it in a microwave oven and spray painted it in regal colors.

Instant grandeur.

"A lot of people look around them and see things as mundane," said Parks, who is a wildlife biologist and educator at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service. "I see the beauty."

It's an inspired lesson for the holiday season: to come across dross and dreck and see silver and gold.

Think of Charlie Brown's tree.

Think of a little drummer boy.

Think of swaddling clothes and a manger of hay.

Beth Parks will laugh if you talk about the elegance of her vision. She's probably laughing as she reads this. She's no artist, she says. She's not even a craftsperson. She's not clever that way. She likes to watch the seals and foxes and ospreys and eagles who live near her house. She's a scientist, for goodness' sake.

Her excuse for doing the decorative project?

"I'm cheap," Parks said. "I had a lot of gifts to give. People really enjoy these things."

So she made hundreds. Sent them to friends in Japan. Gave them as gifts. And she invited us to come see her tree.

This is what she said: *Maybe there's a kid out there who would like to do something like this. Maybe it would be a good family project. And, please make sure people know to do this in a well-ventilated place.*

Here's what we think: Parks isn't really cheap. She's wealthy.

In the spirit of the season, we say follow Parks' example. Look for the simple treasures. Look for ways to make life sparkle. Seek out riches in something other than the gifts under the tree.

Hey, you might even take a walk along the beach. Or around your neighborhood — wherever it is. And think of treasures born of this day.