

# Deck the (condo) halls with boughs of holly ... or not? | Home & Living

*Jimmy Jackson*

So a BLIZZARD of Christmas decorations has overtaken your office. Every store you visit drips with ornaments and displays hawking holiday merchandise, and cars have sprouted wreaths on their grilles. Not to be a Grinch, but wouldn't it be nice if your condo complex was just its normal self, free from Christmas glitz?

However, opposite your unit is another condo whose owner could hardly wait to decorate, and she has a big, glittery "Merry Christmas" lettered in one window, an inflatable Santa and a glowing, tinsel tree on her balcony, and a zillion blinking Christmas lights in every window.

To deck or not to deck the halls? That is the question confronting many a condominium community's bylaws or regulations.

If you live in a condo or know someone who does, you're probably aware that condo complexes are not "anything-goes" communities. There are rules governing everything from trash containers and parking to what kind of outdoor furniture you can have on your balcony. To put it in a gentler way, there are community standards, set out in the community's bylaws or regulations.

These standards should reflect the view of a majority, even a supermajority, of the owners. That does not mean the standards are identical at every complex, and you can see that with complexes' different stances on holiday decorations.

**Here are three examples** found on the web of how local condo complexes' rules or bylaws regulate decorations:

n Witchduck Lake Condominium Association, Virginia Beach: "14. Seasonal Decorations – Seasonal decorations mean those temporary decorations associated with a particular national/state, local or religious holiday. Seasonal decorations may be displayed up to (7) days before and seven (7) days after such holiday, in addition to the period from one (1) day after Thanksgiving to January 6th of the following year."

n Crescent Condominium Association, Virginia Beach: "10. Wreaths and other decorations may be displayed on the unit door. The Association, at its sole discretion, may require the modification or removal of the decoration after the fact, which direction will be promptly complied with by the unit owner/resident.

11. Seasonal/holiday wreaths and candle lights may be displayed through unit windows.

12. Christmas/December Holidays:

a. Decorations displayed outside of the residences may be displayed as early as Thanksgiving and up to no later than the second week in January.

- b. Wreaths may be displayed on front/storm door and/or patio fence.
- c. No blinking or neon lights are permitted.
- d. No displays will be permitted on common areas, except as determined by the Association.
- e. No inflatable displays are permitted.

13. All other Seasonal Decorations: These may be placed in front of units and in flower beds but must be removed no later than (1) week after the respective season (spring, summer, fall, winter) or holiday being celebrated (i.e. Easter, Halloween, Christmas, or other national and/or religious holiday of any faith)."

n Summerset Lake, Virginia Beach: "7. Holiday decorations will be permitted each year from Thanksgiving Day until January 7th on Limited Common Elements. Residents may decorate their respective front porches areas and doors with season appropriate decorations that do not involve screws, nails, or adhesives that leave any mark or residue when they are removed. Lights on the front of the Buildings may be affixed to the inside or outside of windows or around doors and can be white or multicolored. Shrubs immediately adjacent to a Unit may be decorated with white or multicolored lights. Trees, sidewalks, General Common Elements, and garage doors may not be decorated. Rear decks may be decorated at the discretion of the resident. The Board of Directors reserves the right to require residents to immediately remove any offensive item or offensive decoration from the front or rear of the Unit. The Board reserves the right to determine what is 'offensive' in its sole discretion."

**Obviously, the standards** above range from the general to the highly specific. None is more right than another, because each reflects the general will of that specific condominium community.

But there are some principles every complex must observe as it composes or enforces rules for decorations.

First, the rules must be applied consistently, without exceptions or selective enforcement. Secondly, do not discriminate on the basis of religion. You cannot allow decorations for the Christmas holiday but prohibit decorations celebrating the holidays of any other faith.

If you live in a complex where residents have an unwritten consensus about what is reasonable decorating, good for you! But if you are on the board of directors of a complex that has no decorating standards in its bylaws, consider adding such a standard to your policies – after consulting your residents, of course.

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