



# Stitching the GOLDEN BOUGH

and other Christmas  
greenery

La cueillette du gui (the mistletoe  
gathering) c 1930

Mistletoe is possibly one of the less well-known exports from France to the United Kingdom. It started when the French government imposed a ban on the growing of le gui in the apple orchards of Northern France, obliging the growers to have a cull. English demand for mistletoe in the 1890s was such that the French prunings created a profitable export industry, with cross-channel steamboats piled high with mistletoe arriving in Southampton each December, to be taken by train to London's flower markets.

THANKS TO JONATHAN BRIGGS FOR THE USE OF THIS IMAGE. HIS PASSION FOR MISTLETOE LEAPS FROM THE SCREEN AT [WWW.ENGLISHMISTLETOESHOP.CO.UK](http://WWW.ENGLISHMISTLETOESHOP.CO.UK) WHERE YOU CAN READ HIS BLOG AND MANY MORE INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MISTLETOE. IN OTHER YEARS, YOU CAN ALSO ORDER BUNDLES OF FRESH MISTLETOE.

With its white berries, distinctive branching pattern and perfectly-paired leaves, mistletoe or *Viscum album*, is one of our more unusual plants. There are many other mistletoe species worldwide but that which grows in our old English oaks and apple trees is the true mistletoe of legend.

The 'golden bough' Aeneas must find to guide him to Hades in search of his dead father has long been thought to have been mistletoe, which often appears golden in the winter. It became famous as a symbol of myth and legend when Sir James Frazer used it as the title of his monumental work on magic and religion in 1922, featuring a woodcut illustration of mistletoe on the title page.

The ancient Gallic Druids revered the mistletoe they found in oak trees and believed that it had magical properties. The use of greenery to decorate the home has its roots in the celebration of the Winter Solstice, stretching back much further in time than Christianity. Yet mistletoe continues to be viewed as a plant with Pagan leanings, and as such is often banned from the garlands of greenery adorning churches at Christmas. Norse legend accounts for mistletoe becoming a symbol of peace and friendship, and it is in this spirit that sprigs of it are exchanged at New Year in France, where it often adorns the 'Bonne Année' cards. ➡





There are various photographs online of English soldiers buying mistletoe in France during the Great War, but none so touching as this, taken during the Christmas of 1914 when soldiers from all the countries involved emerged from their trenches to exchange words and gestures of peace.



Left: Mistletoe threads  
DMC 370  
DMC 611  
Honey Dew Gentle Art  
Grits Weeks Dye Works

Above: For this version, I have used a favourite DMC 370 for its greeny-gold colour, and a creamier colour for the berries.



## Mistletoe Kisses

*No-one is quite sure where this tradition, dating from the nineteenth century comes from.*

*It may originate in an old Norse practice of warring enemies calling truce under mistletoe, sealing their pledge with a kiss; this certainly conjures a vision or two...*



Above: Mistletoe lends itself to a stylised representation. Here a design printed on linen has been painted. Mixing paint and stitch can be very effective and allows you to stitch more lightly to add a little texture, without covering the whole design.

Left: The mistletoe is the same design as that above right, but has been worked in padded satin stitch, using Honey Dew by Gentle Art, and Weeks Dye Works Grits for the berries. ➡

