

Why buy a real tree?

It seems that the battle between real and artificial Christmas trees is almost as old as the tradition itself. The debate started with the first artificial trees that were in fact invented in the 1930s by a toilet bowl brush company—Addis Brush Company. That's right, the first artificial Christmas tree was made from the same machinery and material as the green toilet bowl brushes the company made. From then on debate raged about the benefits of each.

It is true that a real tree is more work; it sheds its needles and is often not a perfect shape (especially ours!). What you get when you bring a tree into your home for a few weeks is the outside in. For those few weeks a tree dominates your home with all its messy, fragrant, and inconvenient beauty. It is not supposed to be an appliance or blend in like a piece of furniture, it is supposed to remind you that this is a special time and that the time you spend around it caring for it, lighting it, decorating it, smelling it, placing gifts under it for your loved ones helps set this time of year apart from any other. It is a marker of something beyond ourselves, something special. For us a fresh, real tree sustainably managed without chemical sprays is the kind of arboreal visitor that is appropriate for the special season. The debate between real and artificial trees continues, but ask yourself which would you most like to share your home and family with during this time-honored season: an overgrown toilet brush or a real, fragrant tree? OK, we are biased.

As for the question about which is better for the environment: Environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), among other leading environmental organizations, support locally grown, non-chemically treated Christmas trees that are recycled as the best environmental Christmas tree choice (see link below). Many people believe that because artificial trees can be reused, they have less of an impact on the environment. The truth is that an artificial tree has several environmental consequences even if you keep it for a few years. In fact, the average household keeps an artificial tree for about 5 years. As an environmentally conscious consumer one may vow to keep it "forever", but let's be honest, one day it will probably end up in a landfill.

Most artificial trees are manufactured overseas, therefore the cargo ships and trucks used to transport artificial trees from abroad to your local store produce carbon emissions. Moreover, artificial trees are usually made of non-renewable materials such as petroleum, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), or polyethylene (PE). Polyvinyl chloride which are not biodegradable, and since most artificial trees are not or cannot be recycled, they will eventually make their way to a landfill to emit these hazardous chemicals that are classified as carcinogens.

For more info on real trees and their environmental value:

<http://www.nrdc.org/living/stuff/tree-choice-care-and-decorating-tips-holidays.asp>

So support local farmers, preserve green space, and have a wonderful fragrant tree all at the same time.