

## **Real Christmas trees are the environmentally friendly choice**

The winter season is around the corner and Canadians will soon begin searching their basements, garages and sheds for various Christmas decorations.

Yet, when it comes to the most important decoration - the Christmas tree - homeowners often don't consider the benefits of choosing a real tree.

Carla Grant, Executive Director of the Ontario Forestry Association, explains why real trees are better than artificial trees, and offers some excellent tips for finding that perfect tree.

"Christmas trees are grown on farms specifically for the holiday, and while growing, are a carbon sink, and provide wildlife habitat and soil and water retention," says Ms. Grant. "Real Christmas trees are also grown locally and are 100 per cent biodegradable, unlike artificial trees, which are often transported halfway around the world and are made from non-biodegradable petroleum based product that requires a lot of energy during the manufacturing process."

When selecting a pre-cut Christmas tree, Ms. Grant offers the following tips: "First, brush your hand across the needles. The fewer needles that come off, the fresher the tree. Next, check for sap seeping from the cut on the trunk. Seeping sap is another indication of freshness. Finally, when cutting the tree yourself," adds Ms. Grant, "look for a straight trunk with few gaps in the branches."

Once you get the tree home, there are certain things you can do to ensure your Christmas tree stays fresh throughout the holiday season. "It is essential to cut a couple of centimetres off the bottom of the trunk to provide a clean surface for the tree to take up water. If a fresh surface is not created, the tree will not take up water," explains Ms Grant. "It is also vital that the tree is watered every day and kept away from any heat sources to avoid drying it out."

As you prepare for the upcoming holiday season, remember that nothing compares to the smell of a real tree in the home!



*The **Ontario Forestry Association** is a non-profit, registered charity dedicated to raising awareness and understanding of Ontario's forests, and to developing stewardship of forest ecosystems. Visit [www.oforest.on.ca](http://www.oforest.on.ca).*

## **BACKGROUNDER**

### ***2007 Christmas tree fact sheet Ontario Forestry Association***

#### **Real Christmas trees are more environmentally friendly than artificial trees:**

- Christmas trees are raised for that purpose, often on marginal land that wouldn't support other types of agriculture.
- Trees provide environmental benefits such as wildlife habitat, soil and water retention.
- Christmas tree plantations act as a carbon dioxide sink. Each tree fixes carbon dioxide given off by cars and jets.
- One acre of Christmas trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people daily.
- In Ontario, over 500 farmers produce more than one million Christmas trees each year.
- Real Christmas trees are 100 per cent biodegradable. Trees mulched after Christmas are often used in municipal parks. Recently, a pharmaceutical company in Ontario began processing needles to extract an ingredient for use in a flu vaccine.
- In comparison, artificial trees are non-biodegradable and their manufacturing process requires large amounts of fossil fuels.
- The transportation of artificial trees halfway around the world adds significantly to the overall consumption of fossil fuels.

#### **Choosing a real Christmas tree:**

- The most common trees used during the holidays include pine, fir, and spruce. Spruce tend to lose their needles first, and fir are somewhat slower.
- Upon deciding the type and size of Christmas tree, make sure your tree is fresh. A freshly cut tree will last longer and its needles will stay on the branches, instead of your floor.
- While checking the lot for a fresh tree, make sure that the trunk has some sap coming out of it.
- Look for a tree that does not have brown needles.
- The needles of pine and spruce should bend and not break. They should also be hard to pull off the branches.
- Raise the tree just a few inches and drop it on the base of the trunk. Shake it a little if you can. Few needles should drop off. If they do, your tree may have been cut too long ago and has already dried out.

#### **Growing your own Christmas tree:**

If you are lucky enough to own 10 or more acres of forested property, you may be eligible for a property tax reduction of up to 75 per cent through the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP). Growing Christmas trees may be part of your managed forest plan under MFTIP. See [www.oforest.on.ca](http://www.oforest.on.ca) for more information.

#### **Caring for your cut tree:**

- With a saw, remove a two centimeter disk of wood from the bottom of the trunk, providing a clean cut that allows the tree to absorb water.
- Ensure that your tree has adequate water.
- Display your tree away from direct heat to maintaining moisture and the fresh look of the tree.
- Some people add floral preservatives, aspirin and even honey to tree stand water, but there is no evidence that these provide any benefit.

**Environmentally friendly decorations:**

Choose Seasonal LED lighting. These festive lights use up to 90 per cent less electricity and last up to 10 times longer than traditional incandescent seasonal lights. Many local electricity utilities have promotions for discounts and trade-ins, encouraging people to switch to LEDs. Check with your local utility.

**The first Christmas tree:**

- Devout Christians began using the Christmas tree symbol in the 16th century when they brought decorated trees into their homes.
- The first Christmas tree in Canada is reputed to have been in Sorel, Quebec in 1781.