

STUDENT LIFE

TREE

1. How did the tradition of decorating evergreens at Christmas begin?

The tradition of decorating evergreens can be traced back to ancient times in Rome and Egypt in celebration of the winter solstice. In 1510, the first Christmas tree was displayed in Riga, Latvia. Early decorations included ribbon, food, lace and tin. The custom was later brought to America during the Revolutionary War by Hessian mercenaries.

2. What is the height of the tallest tree in history?

The world's tallest recorded Christmas tree was a 221-foot Douglas fir at the Northgate Shopping Center in Seattle in 1950. In 2001, the tallest artificial tree stood at 170.6 feet and was displayed at Moinhos de Vento Park, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Also known as the "Peace Tree," it was made of green PVC foliage and had a lightning red and flashing lights to warn aircraft.

3. Can I buy a tree, sight unseen?

Yes. Approximately 330,000 real Christmas trees each year are sold via the Internet or catalog.

4. How long does it take a Christmas tree to grow?

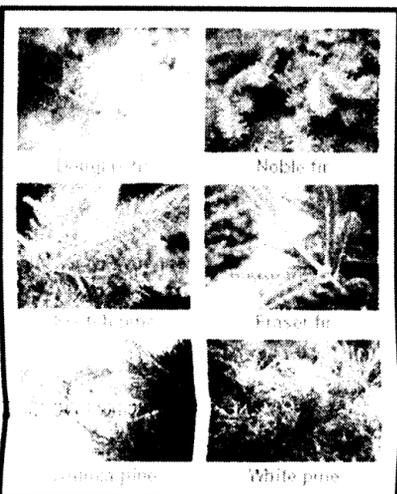
Depending on the variety, the average tree takes seven years to grow 6 feet, the average retail height. Some trees require 15 years of growth to reach the same height.

5. How do trees get that perfect shape?

Evergreens do not naturally grow into the picture-perfect shape that is popular for Christmas trees. As trees grow, farmers control their shape through regular shearing. By using clippers to control the width and form of the branches, farmers force trees to grow into the popular cone shape.

6. What are the most popular Christmas tree varieties?

The most popular Christmas tree varieties include:



7. What should I expect when I go to a farm to cut my own tree?

Here are some tips from the National Christmas Tree Association:

- Beware of fire-ant mounds, tree stumps, an occasional blackberry vine, uneven ground and sharp saws.

- Wear comfortable shoes and old clothes. Bring rain gear if the weather is threatening. Also bring several pairs of work gloves. Leave your pets at home, or keep them leashed at all times.

- Saws are usually provided by the farm operator.

- Some farms measure and price their trees individually, others sell them by the foot. Ask about the pricing policy before heading out in the field.

- Select the tree that fits your predetermined needs (ceiling height, type of foliage, etc.) Check the trunk to be sure that it is sufficiently straight. Keep in mind that pines will usually have, at least, some crook in their trunks. Also check that the tree has a sufficiently long handle to accommodate your stand.

- Cutting the tree is easiest as a two-person project. The person who is cutting usually lies on the ground, while the helper holds the bottom limbs up.

- Bring the tree to the processing area where it will be cleaned and netted. Netting makes transporting and handling the tree substantially easier.

- When you are checking out, remember to pick up a tree removal bag. It can be used as a tree skirt and then pulled up around the tree to help keep the floors clean when the tree is being taken down.

8. Where are most Christmas trees grown?

There are about 15,000 tree growers in the United States, with farms in every state. The top Christmas tree-producing states are Oregon, California, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

9. How much do Americans spend on Christmas trees?

More than 23 million real Christmas trees were sold in 2003, valued at \$791 million. The average Christmas tree costs \$33.80.

Facts, tips and trivia about the holiday evergreen

10. How can I keep my Christmas tree fresh?

Proper watering and care are necessary to keep a tree fresh. The following tips can keep a tree fresh and hydrated through the holiday season:

- When shopping for a tree, choose one that is not losing needles or fading. Both are signs of excessive dryness.

- Make a fresh cut before placing the tree in its stand to allow maximum water absorption.

- The average tree needs 1 quart of water a day. Additives such as aspirin or commercial powders are not necessary and could harm the tree.

- Place the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces or television sets, which could cause the tree to dry out.

11. Where is the national Christmas tree?

The national Christmas tree can be found on the White House lawn. In 1923, President Coolidge started the tradition of the national Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

12. Where can I find the best tree in the United States?

Every year, members of the National Christmas Tree Association pick the best tree and name it grand champion. The award-winning tree is presented to the president and the first family each year to be displayed inside the White House.



ERIC DRAPER/THE WHITE HOUSE
President George W. Bush and Laura Bush stand in front of the 2002 Christmas tree.

13. Has the government ever made any tree regulations?

The government once banned the use of tinsel because it contained lead and was a health hazard. Today's tinsel is made of plastic and is safe to use. President Teddy Roosevelt banned Christmas trees from the White House for a time because he thought the tradition was harmful to the environment and wanted to encourage conservation.

14. Am I hurting the environment if I display a real tree?

Ninety-eight percent of Christmas trees are harvested from farms. For every tree harvested, two to three seedlings are planted in its place. Christmas trees also create oxygen, which benefits the environment. One acre of Christmas trees can produce enough oxygen for 18 people.

15. What is flocking and why is it used?

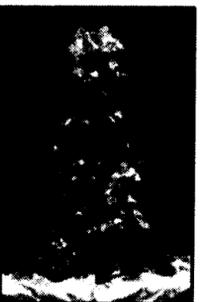
Flocking is spraying adhesive coating to the branches of Christmas trees. The branches of a flocked tree look as if they are covered in snow. Colors other than white are also available.

16. Are real trees more popular than artificial ones?

Most people prefer artificial trees because they require little work. During the 2002 Christmas season, almost 50 percent of households displayed an artificial tree. Only 21 percent used real trees.

17. What are some popular alternatives to traditional Christmas trees?

In warmer regions, many people choose to decorate palm trees instead of the traditional evergreen. Some choose to make their own tree out of everyday items, such as lights and drinking glasses.



BOB F. LINDQUIST
A four-foot pink turkey feather Christmas tree.

18. Are Christmas trees recyclable?

Real Christmas trees can be used in a variety of ways after the holidays. The trunk and branches

can be converted into mulch for the garden. They can also be used as bird feeders or as a refuge for fish in private ponds.

19. Can I replant my tree after the holidays?

Trees that can be replanted, also called "living trees," are gaining in popularity. Living trees are sold with their roots intact so they can be potted or planted when taken home.

20. Are real trees a fire hazard?

Fresh Christmas trees that are watered regularly are generally not a fire hazard. Less than 0.001 percent of Christmas trees are involved in a fire.

— Daniel Cooper,
Fort Worth
Star-Telegram



SOURCES:
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