

# CHOOSING AND CARING FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE

By Katherine Sorrell

**Which tree to buy? Where to put it? And how best to look after it? We help you to make the most of your festive centrepiece.**

Some say there is no substitute for a real Christmas tree – while others argue that artificial trees are an excellent alternative. We offer some arboreal insights.

## **Which type of real tree?**

For the smell and feel of Christmas, you can't beat a real tree. But which type should you opt for? The Norway Spruce is the classic choice, with a traditional shape, plenty of branches and a long-lasting scent. However, it can be on the spikey side and is more likely to shed needles. The Nordmann Fir is the most popular Christmas tree in Europe and has an even shape, soft foliage and glossy, dark green needles that don't drop much. The Scots Pine is less common but retains its needles and has a lovely, fresh smell, while the Fraser Fir – popular in the USA – has silvery-green, dense, bushy foliage and soft, low-shed needles that give off a citrusy aroma. The majestic Noble Fir features dense whorls of blueish needles with well-spaced foliage while the unusual Lodgepole Pine is bushy, with upward-pointing branches, a strong pine scent and the best needle-retention of all.

## **Cut or container?**

Freshly cut Christmas trees provide a problem when it comes to disposal (though they are, of course, biodegradable). For some, a great alternative could be a Christmas tree purpose-grown in a pot. Once the festive season is over the tree can be moved outside in its pot until next year. Each year it will get a little bigger, and it can be kept for up to three years.

## **Preparing for your tree-shopping trip**

First, write down the dimensions of the space – height and width – into which your tree will fit, and take them with you along with a tape measure. Pack a pair of heavy gloves to protect your hands, and an old blanket to catch pine needles that fall off in the boot of your car. If transporting your tree on the roof of the car, take a suitable rope and perhaps a tarpaulin to wrap around the tree for protection.



The colours of tree decorations can complement those of the room as a whole. Gabrielle three-seater sofa, £1,099, Sofology: 03444 818 181; [sofology.co.uk](http://sofology.co.uk).

## Picking out the best tree

Look for a symmetrical tree with evenly distributed branches. The freshest trees will boast shiny, green needles that don't drop off if you pull gently on a branch. Avoid trees with dry or brown needles. Buying direct from a local grower ensures that the tree hasn't travelled far or been out of the ground for too long.

## What about artificial trees?

Modern artificial trees are incredibly realistic, though probably won't have the natural appearance (or the delicious smell) that real trees offer. Generally, the more you pay the better an artificial tree will look, and large, luxurious versions can be expensive. The upside is that it can be used again and again (thus diminishing its environmental impact) – though consider how easily it dismantles or folds down, how heavy it is, and where and how you will store it.

## Which artificial tree?

If you have decided to opt for artificial, the next stage is to measure for the optimum dimensions. There is a huge variety of shapes and sizes on offer, including regular, slim and half (flat-back)



A selection of primary-coloured tree decorations, plus sweet pom-pom garlands, is modern and eye-catching. Six-foot real-look Christmas tree, £89; wicker tree skirt, £15; decorations, from a selection; all Dunelm: 0845 165 6565; dunelm.com.

trees, while colours range from white to black and everything in between. You may come across a choice between PVC needles, which are flat and papery, and PE, or polyethylene, needles, which are more realistic though more expensive. Many artificial trees are pre-lit, too, with LED fairy lights already wound around the branches and ready to plug in, and some are 'frosted' with a dusting of artificial snow.

## Caring for your real tree

- If you want it to look good right through until Twelfth Night, try to buy your tree as late as possible.
- Ask the seller to saw a small slice off the bottom of the trunk (alternatively, do this yourself as soon as you get home). This will help it to absorb water.
- Stand the tree in a bucket of water in a cool place until you are ready to position and decorate it.
- If possible, place the tree in a cool spot, away from fires or radiators. Even a sunny window can hasten the tree's decline. Secure it in a correctly sized, sturdy stand and adjust it so it is level. Fill the reservoir with water and check this regularly, topping up as necessary.



A snowy, frosty look works well with white and silver decorations. Frosted Norway spruce seven-foot artificial Christmas tree, £369.99; glitter LED Christmas bauble trio, £11.99; Osby star lights, from £7.99; champagne bow Christmas decoration, £7.99; all Lights4fun: 01423 816 040; lights4fun.co.uk.

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Freshly cut Christmas trees provide a problem when it comes to disposal, so a great alternative is a tree purpose-grown in a pot. After Christmas the tree can be moved outside until next year. It will grow but can be kept for up to three years.

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Measure the height and width of the space available for your tree and take a tape measure with you. Pack a pair of heavy gloves and an old blanket to catch pine needles that fall off in the boot of your car. If transporting your tree on your car's roof, take a rope and perhaps a tarpaulin to wrap around the tree.

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Tree decoration colours can complement the room.  
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## Which artificial tree?

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