

Holiday Decorating **GUIDE**



Picking the Perfect Tree

You can't deck the halls without a tailor-made Tannenbaum. Keep reading for tips for picking just the right real Christmas tree for your house.

KNOW YOUR SPACE

The National Christmas Tree Association says the first step to picking the right fir is to know where you want it in the home. Measure the ceiling height and make sure to buy a tree that will fit with room to spare for the star on top. Remember, that tree looks a lot smaller outside than it does in the confines of your home.

KNOW YOUR DECOR

While you're perusing your local tree lot, keep in mind the decorations you plan to use. If you have a flair for the dramatic and have larger bulbs and baubles, choose trees with sturdy branches and lots of space in between. Delicate, small ornaments can hang on slender, dense branches.

POPULAR VARIETIES

While the traditional Tannenbaum is a fir tree, many retailers offer a variety of tree species for sale. These include several species of fir, of course, as well as pine, spruce, cypress and red cedar. Ask your retailer where its trees come from and



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how often they are delivered. More recent arrivals are probably fresher because they were just cut. Also ask which of the varieties does best where you live for a tree that stays fresher longer.

TEST YOUR TREE

The association also

encourages a needle test to check the tree's health. Look for lost needles, discoloration, a musty odor and wrinkled bark. When you run your hand along the tree's branches, the needles should not come off easily. Branches should be pliable; if they snap, the tree is too dry.

KEEP YOUR TREE FRESH

Once you've chosen a fresh, healthy tree, follow these tips from the National Christmas Tree Association to keep your tree fresh through the season. Keep your tree in a reservoir-type tree stand. Use a stand with adequate capacity for your tree -- one quart of

water per inch of stem diameter. Don't whittle the sides down to fit your stand. Make a fresh cut to remove a half inch of wood from the base of the trunk before putting it in the stand. Don't cut at an angle or a V-shape, which reduces the tree's ability to drink.

Artificial Trees, Real Cheer



If you're tired of the mess of a real tree, an investment in a quality artificial tree may be right for you this year.

But just because the tree is fake doesn't mean the cheer can't be real. Follow these tips for picking out the perfect artificial tree to bring your family years of warm memories.

THINK OF THE ROOM

Just like with a real tree, you'll need to carefully consider your space. The good news is that artificial trees come in a variety of sizes and shapes, from gigantic all the way down to tabletop friendly minis. Also consider storage space: most of your tree's life is going to be spent in storage. Look at how trees break down and go back up. You might also consider a quality storage bag.

TRUE TO FORM

Artificial trees have come a long way from the silvery cones of years past. Now, artificial trees can be found in a range of colors and varieties, some of which are ringers for their real counterparts. If there's a popular variety of real tree, chances are you can find an artificial version. For the best real feel, Consumer Reports advises choosing a tree that is labeled "true needle" or "real feel."

LIGHTS ON, LIGHTS OFF

Many models of tree now come pre-strung with energy-saving LED lights. Consider not only your present decorating plans, but what you're likely to do in years to come. Will you still be a fan of all-white lights in the 20 years the American Christmas Tree Association says your artificial tree may last? For a little more investment, you might like a model with different options for lighting colors and patterns.

SAFETY FIRST

Pick a tree that has a sturdy stand that will stand the test of time and any heavy ornaments you may have. Also, make sure the tree is fire retardant and that you place it at least three feet from a heat source. Read online reviews, Consumer Reports says, and look for complaints of failing branches or needles falling off.

Leave it to the Pros

If you've got tangled light balls dancing through your head instead of visions of sugarplums, consider leaving the decorating to the professionals this year.

For a fee, there are a variety of companies that will decorate your home inside and out for a picture-perfect (and hassle-free) holiday.

Be clear about your cheer. As with any service, different companies provide different levels of service. Get estimates from several companies and make sure to ask each about exactly what, how and when they work. Be explicit with your expectations up front and remember, there aren't any stupid questions. Fire away now before your wallet is on the line.

LIGHT IT UP

If you want to use your own decor, be aware that it might be hard to find a professional decorator to work with you, especially when it comes to light displays. Angie's List, a website that connects homeowners to local businesses and contractors, says many professionals prefer to rely on products they know and that they know will work. Companies will either lease or sell the decorations to the homeowner.



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STAY ON BUDGET BUT STAY SAFE

Decorating services can run from a few hundred to several

thousand dollars. There are ways to save, but don't cut corners when it comes to safety. Make sure your contractor has

the right insurance; we are, after all, talking about electricity and people on your roof in possibly freezing conditions.

Make sure the workers wear appropriate safety gear, and don't be afraid to call them out if you see safety issues.

Poinsettia Pointers

Bright red and green poinsettias are everywhere during the holiday season. But did you know that they're a tropical plant that thrives far beyond our snowy visions of Christmas?

Read on to find out how this plant became such a big part of our holiday and how to keep your poinsettia looking bright and fresh.

HISTORY

In 1825, Joel Roberts Poinsett, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, introduced *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, a small shrub in the spurge family, to the United States. The poinsettia, as you may have figured out by now, takes its name from Poinsett.

The plant first became associated with Christmas, however, long before Poinsett's time. In 16th century Mexico, the legend goes, a girl was too poor to bring a gift for a celebration of Jesus' birthday and was inspired by an angel to pick weeds from the roadside for the church altar. Those weeds sprouted into red poinsettias. Franciscan friars included the plants in their Christmas celebrations, saying the star-shaped leaves symbolized the star of Bethlehem and the color red represents the crucifixion of Jesus.

In the early 1900s, Albert Ecke began selling poinsettias from street stands. His grandson, Paul Ecke changed shipping from rail to air and sent

plants to television stations for free displays. He relentlessly promoted the plants and, through exclusive grafting techniques, kept his company in a near monopoly of poinsettia sales in the U.S. through the 1980s.

CHOOSING AND CARING FOR POINSETTIAS

Pick a poinsettia with dark green leaves and few low or damaged leaves, Michigan State University says. Colored leaves, usually red, pink or white, should be in proportion to the plant and pot. Because it's a tropical plant, exposure to even brief periods of cold temperatures can injure the plant, so make sure it's well wrapped until you get it inside.

Set the plant near a sunny window, but don't let it touch cold window panes. Extend the bloom time by switching the plant to a cooler -- 55 to 60-degree -- room at night. Water your plant only when it feels dry and discard any excess water. A droopy plant that drops leaves is too dry while a plant that's overwatered will have yellow leaves. You can feed your plant with a regular houseplant fertilizer.

Have a Very Green Holiday

Make your Christmas celebrations extra green by using these easy and simple sustainable ideas.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Most communities have a Christmas tree recycling campaign that starts just after the holiday is over. These programs are either curbside, where you just leave your tree outside and the municipality picks it up, or drop-off, where you take your tree to a collection point. If you don't have a program in your area, look for local garden centers that will mulch your tree for you to use in your yard come spring. Some nonprofits will also collect your tree for a small fee.

Don't forget about wrapping paper, either. Many companies offer recycled wrapping paper options in a variety of patterns. And, of course, you can always drop off your used wrapping paper, boxes, and other paper trimmings off at your local recycling center. Read your labels, though, and make sure your recycling the right things. Many bows, for example, only contaminate the recycling bin.

GIFT GREEN

There are also many companies out there that turn used items into chic bags, phone cases, glassware, blankets and other highly giftable goods. Remember to factor in things like shipping when considering the impact of a gift on the environment. If it has to be flown in from overseas, it may not be as

green as you think.

For a really green holiday, the best idea may be to simply give less. Do a gift exchange instead of buying for everyone in your family and don't be afraid to regift items or give only hand-made goods. Otherwise, look for locally made, battery-free gift to minimize your impact on the environment.

GIVE GREEN

We've already learned that buying less is a great step toward a sustainable Christmas. But you can also give to charities in the name of your friends and family, particularly those that are hard to buy for. There are several websites for evaluating charities; whichever one you choose, make sure the charity is reputable and lines up with the interest of the person you're making a gift for.



Holiday Color Trends

We've seen purple everywhere in 2018, and holiday displays won't likely be any different. In fact, the Pantone color of 2018 is ultra-violet, a dramatic and eye-catching shade of purple. Here are some more combinations you're likely to see around the trees.

ECLECTIC

Anything goes in this mix-and-match decorating style that combines colors, styles and cultures for a gloriously glam holiday look. While it may look extraordinarily complicated, the key to eclectic style is really to keep things as simple as possible. Don't look for fancy card holders, just stick them up with plain old tape. Do try to group together like colors once in a while to give the eye a break and remember that these spaces have to be lived in, too. Place your decor accordingly.

ROSE GOLD

Another color that's been everywhere is rose gold. Pair this soft pink metallic with vivid purples for a dramatic look or pale pink for a toned down, feminine look. Look for rose gold versions of traditional metal holiday decor, like candlesticks, but also in tree ornaments or even whole trees.

BLUE & WHITE

Classic deep blues and crisp whites have long been a trend in decor. Update this scheme for Christmas by pairing these colors with shades of holiday green and frosty silver. Look for the usual navy in with a hint of winter frost in pieces like wreaths and rib-



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bons. Choose greenery that tends toward the blue, like eucalyptus, succulents, silvery olive, and some cypress.

MONOCHROMATIC

Pick a favorite hue and go all out. From the ornaments, to the wrapping paper, to the

lights, make everything the same color or same family of colors. This can be a particularly striking look when

employed with rich jewel tones like emerald green or ruby red. Accent, as always, with classic white to add extra oomph.

From the Hands of Babes

Some of the most touching holiday decor are the things that come from our children. Here's a list of kid-friendly holiday decorating ideas.

Give them their own tree

Put a miniature tree in their room and let them decorate it with shatterproof ornaments. Many tiny trees come with battery-powered LED lights for more safety and shine.

MAKE SANTA A PLATE

Grab a plain white plate and hit the local arts and crafts store for Sharpies in all your kids' favorite colors. Let them draw on the clean plate, then put the plate in a 350-degree oven for 30 minutes. Let the plates cool in the oven before removing them.

WRAP IT UP

Leave the markers out and grab a roll of butcher paper for your own, custom-made gift wrap.

GO RETRO

Remember that box of Christmas ornaments you have from your childhood? Get them out and let your kids recreate your holiday prizes like clothespin snowflakes. Show off your own handiwork while creating new memories of your own. P.S.: These make great gifts for



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the grands.

COOKIE DOUGH ORNAMENTS

We all made these, right? Take four cups of flour and mix with 1 ½ cups of water and ½ cup of salt until it

becomes a soft dough. Roll it out and go to town with cookie cutters, fingerprints and pencils. Bake at 325 degrees for 10 minutes and, as soon as their out, poke a hole in each still-soft cookie for hanging. Spray cooled cook-

ies with a clear protective coating.

MAKE A GINGERBREAD HOUSE

There are a variety of gingerbread house (barn, castle, skyscraper) kits on the market

that will appeal to children of all ages. Pick one up at your local grocer or craft store and make some memories with the whole family. Just remember not to take a bite; these kits are made for sturdy crafting, not necessarily eating.