

Green Choices For Holiday Decorating

by Susan Wilson

Choosing a tree involves more than making sure the branches are symmetrical. Maybe the Natural Resources Committee can help you decide...in favor of the environment. Try this personal preference check-list, checking each item that applies to you.

- Tradition is important; I'm not willing to change
- I'm ready to try something new
- I will be diligent about watering my cut tree
- Watering the tree is the last thing on my mind during the holidays
- I don't want the mess of a live, cut tree (dropped needles and sap)
- I like the ease of a pre-lit artificial tree
- I'll donate/recycle my artificial tree instead of sending it to a landfill
- I'm not having a holiday tree this year

Next, consider these facts:

- * **Impact on the economy.** The holiday tree industry in the US employs about 100,000 people with "tree farms" in 50 states. More than 85% of artificial trees are manufactured in China.
- * **Impact on your pocketbook.** While initially much more expensive than a live cut tree, an artificial tree's many years of use make it an economical choice for many.
- * **Longevity.** Artificial trees remain useful for five or six years. A properly watered live cut tree will hold up well for one holiday season.
- * **Environmental impact.** While alive, fresh cut trees absorb carbon dioxide and contribute oxygen, remove pollen and dust from the air, protect soil from erosion and provide refuge for wildlife. Grown on farms like other crops, holiday trees are both renewable and biodegradable. Artificial trees contain non-biodegradable plastics and potentially dangerous toxins such as lead. They remain in landfills for years after disposal.
- * **Safety.** As fresh cut trees dry out, they become a fire hazard. Most artificial trees are sprayed with fire retardant.

Sources: Lewin Farms, Wading River, NY; National Christmas Tree Association; Frontgate.com

Dial Down Holiday Electric Bills

You can still protect the environment with the type of holiday lights you choose. Flip the "on" switch for energy-efficient decorating with LED (light emitting diode) and fiber-optic lighting products and turn off higher electric bills. LEDs convert energy into light rather than heat; each light in a string uses only .04 watts for up to 90% efficiency over incandescents. LED lights contain no mercury or other toxins and the sturdy epoxy bulbs can last more than 50,000 hours. Plus, if one light goes out, the rest of the string is unaffected.

Compare Costs

Average cost to light an 8' holiday tree with 300 lights for an entire holiday season (30 days for 6 hours per day)

Old-style lights\$33.80

Mini incandescents enclosed in flexible plastic tubing\$ 4.81

LED lights\$.89

The variety and versatility of LED and fiber-optic lighting products are better than ever and these dazzling decorations help reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, provide longer-lasting light and slash energy bills as they add sparkle to your home.

Fiber-optic trees, garlands and wreaths are also good choices for energy-efficient lighting. A single low-wattage incandescent bulb sends light out through tiny fibers integrated with the tree or garland's needles. The result is cool -to -the touch lighting that can be further enhanced with changing colors and special effects.

Sources: Long Island Power Authority - www.lipower.org; NSTAR MASS (investor owned electric & gas utility; Washington State University: Extension Energy Program

Armed with this information and an honest appraisal of your own preferences, you're ready to choose the tree that's best for you and your community.

Or how about this? Don't buy any tree, and in the holiday spirit, donate the money to the non-profit of your choice!