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Real Vs. Fake Trees

When to opt for real or fake, and some alternatives to inspire you!

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If you strive to live an eco-friendly lifestyle, you've probably wondered how to make your Christmas tree – a symbol of Mother Earth, after all – as 'green' as possible. You've come to the right place! We're not only going to put the age-old real vs. fake Christmas tree debate to bed, but offer up some eco-friendly alternatives for this sometimes-messy, symbol of the season.

Real vs. Fake Christmas Trees

The only way to know which option is less harmful for the environment is to conduct a lifecycle analysis. In other words, analyzing each phase of a Christmas tree's existence, from seedling to living room. The American Christmas Tree Association recently examined the following over 1-year, 5-year, and 10-year intervals:

- Greenhouse gases emitted or absorbed (global warming potential)
- Energy input (primary energy demand)
- The impact on terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (eutrophication)
- Acid emissions (acidification)
- Air pollution (smog emissions)

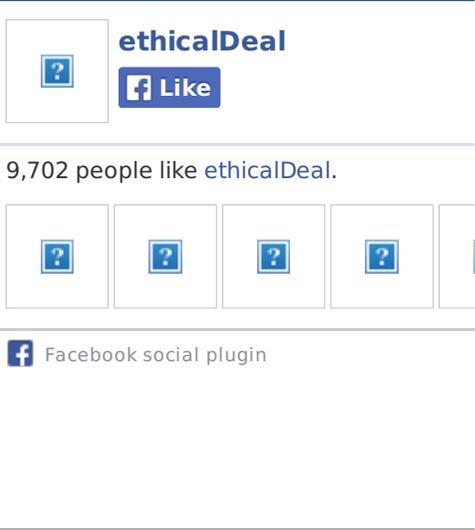


Photocredit: Flickr / IK's World Trip

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-  Recipes (192)

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The study looked at how both live and artificial Christmas trees were produced or manufactured (including packaging, fertilizers, chemical compounds), transported (from manufacturing plant to store to your home), and disposed of (in landfills, incinerators, and composting). The study concluded that the greenest choice depends on how long you use your tree. An artificial tree used for only one year is wasteful but if used long-term, artificial trees always come out as the most sustainable option.

Choosing an Eco-friendly Christmas Tree

Keep an Artificial Tree for 8+ years

If you're a fan of fake, keep it for a long time! An artificial tree has a smaller environmental impact if you use it for 8+ years, with the benefits increasing even more beyond that length of time.

Repurpose a Natural Tree's Materials



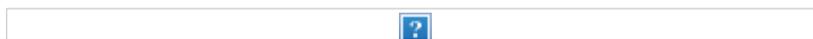
Photocredit: Flickr / zolakoma

In the short term, a real tree wins the battle of eco-consciousness. That said, it's not a particularly green choice (after all, you're cutting down a carbon sink that required lots of chemical fertilizers to grow), but you can improve its eco-friendliness by reusing the branches and other materials.

Alternatives that Bypass the Real or Fake Tree Debate

If you want to avoid the whole debate altogether, or step out of your holiday comfort zone, try one of these Christmas tree alternatives:

Potted Christmas Tree



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Photocredit: Flickr / CarbonNYC

Buy a live tree in a pot (organically grown if possible), decorate it for the season, and plant it in your backyard in the spring. Some cities even have living tree rental services that let you keep the potted tree for the holidays, and return it in January – great for those sans backyard!

Upcycled Tree



Photocredit: Forest Freak

Check out our eco-Christmas decorations post for ideas on how to make a tree out of books. Another idea is to decorate an opened ladder with lights and ornaments to create a sparse but unique A-shaped tree you can put away at the end of the season.

Edible Tree



Photocredit: Flickr / Pictures by Ann

Have fun with your kids making an edible tree using all manner of foods – tiers of cupcakes, stacks of gingerbread, or piles of homemade truffles.

Of course, another idea is to go without a tree by decorating with other eco-friendly items. Not sure where to stack the presents? Gifts placed under the mantel, or piled high on a dining room table may be the perfect way to celebrate without the tree waste!

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