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Christmas Trees in Canada: A Festive Tradition and Sustainable Industry

By

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Christmas in Canada is a magical time filled with traditions, joy, and festive decorations. Among the most iconic symbols of the season is the Christmas tree. The tradition of decorating evergreen trees during the holiday season has deep roots, and in Canada, it holds a special place in the hearts of many Canadians.

The practice of decorating trees during the winter season has ancient origins, with various cultures incorporating evergreen plants into their celebrations. In Canada, the tradition of the Christmas tree can be traced back to the 18th century. European settlers brought the custom with them, and it gradually became a cherished part of Canadian holiday festivities. In the early days, families often ventured into the woods to cut down their own trees.

Types of Christmas Trees in Canada

Before diving into the selection process, it's essential to understand the different types of Christmas trees available. Each type has unique characteristics that can influence the overall look, scent, and longevity of the tree. Here are some popular varieties and a few tree selection choices.

Balsam fir- You may start with the native balsam fir tree species is often considered the 'real' Christmas tree and many growers grow this species for its special aroma. Known for its pleasant fragrance, the Balsam Fir is a favorite among Canadians. Its dark green needles and symmetrical shape make it an excellent choice for ornamentation. Balsam fir has a wonderful green colour and smooth needles which are not prickly. The aroma of balsam fir is so distinct and long lasting. Putting ornaments is easy but may not hold good heavy ornaments as small branch may not have strong stiffness as white spruce or pine. There are several other fir trees such as Fraser, Caanan, Korean and maybe Douglas fir which is not fir at all.

Spruces - there are a variety of spruce trees. You may choose Colorado blue spruce, white spruce, and black hills spruce trees. All spruce trees have prickly short needles with incredible ability to keep ornaments hanging well. Your pet may not come close to the Christmas trees due to prickliness. The colour of needles range from whitish blue to blue and dark green colours. Resilient and adaptable, the white spruce boasts blue-green needles and a conical shape. It's a great option for those seeking a hardy and attractive tree.

Pines - All pine trees have a needle in bundles of 2, 3 and 5. In Alberta, Lodgepole and Scots pine are most common pine chosen for Christmas. Pine trees do not have dense needle crowdedness as fir and spruce, but they are excellent choices as well due to their aroma and long needles. Stiffness of branches are excellent for ornaments. With its sturdy branches and long needles, the Scotch Pine is a traditional favorite. It has a robust structure, making it suitable for hanging various ornaments.



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Picture: U-cut Christmas Tree operation in Alberta

Live vs Plastic Tree

Having plastic Christmas tree is unfortunately quite common for many of us. For many people there is ethical dilemma about cutting live 10 years old tree just for few weeks and then disposing of it in the local landfill. Keep in mind that natural Christmas trees are biodegradable, we can replant them- renewable, they absorb CO₂ and produce oxygen to us. Living tree also adds more to us spiritually and emotionally as well.

On another hand, choosing fossil fuels plastic Christmas tree has own challenges including material(mostly from PVC films) that are made trees from- fossil fuel in nutshell and process that involved high emissions of greenhouse gasses. Most of them are made in factories outside of Canada which includes additional greenhouse gas emissions from shipping as well. Plastic trees of course are not biodegradable, not renewable, create waste pollution and according to USA Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report some possible health issues related to PCV lead contamination.

Choosing the Right Size

Selecting the right size Christmas tree is essential for ensuring it fits well in your living space and can accommodate your decorations. Consider the following factors:

- Room Height: Measure the height of your room before heading out to purchase a tree. It's recommended to leave enough space between the top of the tree and the ceiling to accommodate a tree topper.
- Tree Stand Height: Take into account the height of the tree stand. Ensure that the tree, when placed in the stand, will fit comfortably within your designated space.



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- Width: Consider the width of the tree in relation to the available floor space. A full, bushy tree may require more room, while a slender tree can be a great option for tighter spaces.
- Decoration Considerations: Think about the size and weight of your ornaments. A sturdier, fuller tree may be better suited for heavier decorations, while a slenderer tree may benefit from lighter ornaments.

Choose Locally Grown Trees

Opt for a Christmas tree that has been grown locally. Locally sourced trees have a smaller carbon footprint as they don't need to be transported over long distances. In Alberta, there are very few growers that offer u-cut Christmas trees. The largest Christmas grower in Alberta is [Fir Ever Green Tree Farm](#). This U-cut Christmas tree grower farm gives an incredible opportunity to talk with the grower, hundreds of his clients. Many people do not know that it takes 8-12 years to grow a Christmas tree. It is hard work and production involves planting, watering, weed control, pest control, shearing/shaping and making those trees perfect for you to buy.

An option to going to a U-cut Christmas tree grower is to get a tree from Crown land. To do this, you will need obtain a permit from an [Alberta Government Forestry Office](#) to cut a tree.

Whatever you decide either U-cut from local tree growers or from public lands, make sure that you are dressed appropriately for cold weather, bring tree-cutting tools, and that you have room in your vehicle for the tree in, and let your friends or family know the location you are going to.

Well over two million trees are harvested as Christmas trees across Canada each year. Many people don't know but we have very few Christmas tree growers in Alberta and prairie provinces. The eastern provinces, British Columbia, Oregon, and Washington State are the major suppliers of Christmas trees to Western Canada.

How to test freshness

The freshness of a Christmas tree is crucial for its longevity and appearance throughout the holiday season. Here are some tips to ensure you choose a fresh and vibrant tree:

- Needle Flexibility: Gently run your hand along the branches to test the flexibility of the needles. Fresh needles should be pliable and not break easily.
- Colour: Look for a tree with vibrant, healthy color. Avoid trees with dull or browning needles, as this may indicate dryness and reduced freshness.
- Fragrance: A fresh Christmas tree should emit a strong, pleasant fragrance. Give the tree a gentle shake, and if it releases a burst of scent, it's likely fresh.
- Moisture Content: Check the trunk for resin. A sticky, moist trunk is a sign of a well-hydrated tree. Dry, cracked bark may indicate a lack of moisture.
- Needle Retention: Gently grab a branch and pull your hand toward you. If the tree is fresh, only a few needles should come off in your hand. Excessive needle shedding suggests a less fresh tree.



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Fire Safety

Another important consideration when having a real Christmas tree in the house is fire safety. It's a wonderful family tradition but be sure to follow the instructions for keeping the tree watered so that it doesn't dry out and present a fire hazard. Also, real Christmas trees are 100 per cent reusable and recyclable. Once the needles are off you can chip it or use it in a woodstove or fire pit if weather permits. You can also contact your municipality for details of where and how to recycle the tree in January.

Some key Christmas Tree Tips

Here are a few tips for choosing and caring for a Christmas tree:

- Measure the height and width of the area where the tree will be displayed. Tree that is two meters tall will be approximately 1.6 metres wide (7' tall will be 5' 6" wide) at the bottom.
- Some species have more open foliage, stiffer branches or longer needles – you may want to have an idea of your decorating theme before you pick your tree.
- The [Prairie Christmas Tree Growers Association](#) webpage provides much information about the characteristics of different species of trees that are sold as Christmas trees.
- Look for a retail lot that keeps its Christmas trees fresh in a protected area.
- Store the tree in a cool place, out of the wind and rain, until it is ready to be brought indoors.
- Place a tree moving bag under your tree, ready to be drawn up around the tree to make disposal easy in January.
- Ensure your tree stand is large enough to hold four liters (one gallon) of water as well as the trunk of the tree.
- When bringing the tree indoors, cut 1 to 2 cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch) off the tree stump before placing it in water – the cut must be no more than four hours old, otherwise sap will seal the cut and prevent the water from rising, thus drying out the tree.
- Avoid putting Christmas tree near direct heating sources such as fireplace, furnace vents or sunny windows
- The first water fill should be with very warm water enabling the sap to flow readily. As the tree thaws, water will be drawn upwards replenishing the moisture to the extremities. No additives are required.
- Have a family member top up the water twice daily so the base of the tree never dries out. Your tree will drink several liters of water every day for the first week or two.
- After the holidays, wrap the entire tree in the moving bag, and bring everything outside, including the stand, which can be easily removed once the tree is outdoors and on its side.

Christmas trees hold a special place in the hearts of Canadians, symbolizing the festive spirit and bringing families together. From their historical roots to the economic impact of the industry and the growing emphasis on sustainability, the journey of Christmas trees in Canada is a fascinating and evolving story. As Canadians continue to celebrate the holiday season, the tradition of selecting and decorating a Christmas tree remains a cherished and enduring part of their winter festivities.



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