

The Palm Beach Post

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Faux firs: The fabulous world of artificial Christmas trees

By **COLUMNIST NAME HERE**

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How lovely are

YOUR branches?

We're on the hunt for the most festive firs in Palm Beach County and on the Treasure Coast!

If you think your Christmas tree is a spectacular sight, send it our way!

PLEASE E-MAIL a high-res picture (300 dpi) of your decorated tree and a few sentiments about what makes it so special to Florida Home editor Tonya Favata at Tonya_Favata@pbpost.com by Dec. 7 .

Please put 'holiday tree' in the subject line and include your name, daytime phone number and city where you reside. And remember, it's all about the tree! Photos with people or undecorated trees will not be published.

We'll feature a few trees every Saturday in Florida Home throughout December.

And who knows, a few lucky people may even receive a gift.

Happy holidays!

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree ...

By BARBARA MARSHALL

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Oh, Christmas tree, oh, Christmas tree, with faithful leaves unchanging

Your boughs are green, in summer's glow and do not fade in winter's snow

Oh, Christmas tree, oh, Christmas tree, with faithful leaves unchanging.

Faithful leaves unchanging?

Obviously, the writer of the old German carol never anticipated Target's Hot Pink Fantasy tree or the Purple Groove tree from Treetopia.

Artificial Christmas trees this year are more, well, artificial than ever.

"It's a growing trend," says Meredith Bradford, a Treetopia spokesman. "People are having more fun with the holidays, so they're choosing trees based on their home decor."

While that may not explain the company's red, white and blue Stephen Colbert tree (do you decorate it or salute it?), a blue or red tree is a definite holiday attention-getter.

As for Target's pitiful Charlie Brown tree, it looks like it could use a hug and a mug of cocoa.

Most "fashion" trees, as these obviously faux firs are called, are meant for "second tree" households, where they go up in a family room or children's bedrooms, while living rooms still display more traditional trees. While the frankly fake trees are fun, the best-quality traditional trees are astonishingly lifelike, leaving the toilet bowl brush comparison of past decades far behind.

Upside down trees became a novelty in recent years. While they may look like Dad had a little too much Christmas cheer, according to ChristianityToday.com, the tradition goes back to Germany in the Middle Ages when an upside down tree's triangular shape referred to the Holy Trinity. (And they leave more room underneath for presents!)

According to the American Christmas Tree Association, an artificial tree trade group, 10 million to 12 million fake conifers were imported to the United States last year, most from China. Nearly three times as many real trees were sold.

While a fake tree may be more economical, it may not be the "greenest" choice. For \$100 to \$200 you can find a servicable pre-wired tree that will last for several years, compared with paying \$80 or more each year at the Christmas tree lot.

But fake firs are made from nonrenewable petroleum products in a polluting manufacturing process and require shipping halfway around the globe. On the other hand, most real trees are sprayed with pesticides and require significant fuel to get to the nation's Christmas tree lots.

It's a dilemma worthy of the Gift of the Magi.

Maybe we should reframe the issue: Scrooge would probably have an artificial tree (the Charlie Brown twig) while Tiny Tim would surely opt for the real deal.

This year, prices for artificial trees range as widely as their colors. You can find a \$100 pre-wired tree at Lowe's, or spend more than \$1,000 on an eerily life-like "premium" tree from industry leader Balsam Hill. You can even hang ornaments that emit a pine fragrance.

Most large trees today are made with permanently attached, hinged branches so there's very little setup. A little fluffing and you're ready to decorate, after cranking the air conditioner down to 65 while singing White Christmas and being thankful we won't have one.

~ barbara_marshall@pbpost.com

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