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Artificial trees come in hues and styles that rival real things

Faux real

By [Wevonneda Minis](#)

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Photographs provided by Balsam Hill and Treetopia.

The trend toward using artificial Christmas trees, such as this Vermont White Spruce from Balsam Hill and orange, champagne, blue and pink trees from Treetopia, is growing. The variety available shows there are trees to suit a wide range of tastes.

Remember when the color of your Christmas tree referred to things such as lights, ornaments and bows? Well, Virginia, things aren't that way anymore. So get ready to consider trees that come in gold, orange, pink, purple, red and several other colors.

That old '60s silver tree with the revolving light is beginning to look pretty mainstream. Amid a wider acceptance of artificial trees by the public, it seems there's something for just about everyone. In addition to the stunning array of bright colors, there are greens styled to compete with natural trees at many price points.

Merchants selling artificial color and green trees at big-box, mega-discount, online and speciality stores say consumers are attracted to them because they are easy to set up with lights already attached and they last for several years.

Over time, they cost less than purchasing a natural tree each year, but they are more expensive to begin with. Expect to pay about \$40-\$120 for a natural tree 6 feet or taller and \$98-\$350 for a comparably sized artificial tree.

Artificial trees also are helpful for those with allergies to mold spores.

Fun and funky

Treetopia, an online seller of artificial trees, specializes in fun and funky ones, says spokeswoman Meredith Bradford. The company has been featured on popular television programs including "The Oprah Winfrey Show," "Live With Regis and Kelly" and the "Today" show.

"Some customers like their homes to be fashion-forward, so they incorporate a tree in the latest 'hot' color into their holiday decorating, while others simply want to match the colors of their current home decor," says Bradford, who noted the company also sells artificial green trees.

"Some of our most popular colors are white, pink and black. White is an easy choice if someone wants to try a nontraditional tree, but isn't ready to go to a blue or pink tree," she says.

Others selling color trees include Walmart, whose local stores are carrying 3 1/2-foot-tall pink, purple, blue and white trees. The company's black and white trees, about 6 1/2 feet tall, also are available locally. Walmart will ship red, purple and blue trees, which are about 7 feet tall, ordered via its Web site to the customer's nearest store at no cost. The company also offers an assortment of artificial green trees.

Traditional

Karen Scogin, manager of A Charleston Christmas on the Market, has noticed an increase in the number of people seeking artificial trees over the past several years. Those who shop at the store, which specializes in high-end artificial trees, usually are seeking something special.

Many are looking for a slim tree or one that is 9 or 10 feet tall because they have high ceilings, she says. Many of her customers are attracted to artificial trees because they arrive in a few pieces and can be set up quickly. They also like the idea of not having to buy and string lights.

While most of the trees they sell are green, they do offer bubble trees in a variety of colors.

Bubble trees have pre-lit spiral branches in black, green, red, silver and white that are available 5 1/2, 6 1/2 and 7 1/2 feet tall. The trees have a tubular trunk that displays bubbles in a variety of colors with low-voltage lighting. The colors can be set by owners to rotate or remain constant, and the amount of bubbles can be adjusted.

The store orders most of the trees it sells through a catalog.

Manmade, really

Many early artificial Christmas trees resembled wire brushes, says Jennifer Faulkner, spokeswoman for Balsam Hill, whose trees are sold online and in company stores. It focuses on making green trees that look real. Needles are molded and hand-painted so that their shapes and colors look like the evergreens that inspired their design.

"They are built to last," she says.

"As with any electrical appliance, you should make sure there are no frayed or exposed wires," she added.

The number of people choosing artificial trees has increased gradually over the past few years, says Patti Lee, merchandising manager at Home Depot's Summerville store. Home Depot focuses on green artificial trees that resemble natural ones but also sells a pink tree and palm trees in some stores and online.

"They are getting more and more realistic looking every year," Lee says.

Home Depot has trees that look like Douglas and Frasier firs as well as other styles. Most customers are buying ones that range from 6 to 10 feet tall, which usually are pre-lit.

Sometimes, customers have to look at the trees a few times before being convinced they are fake, she says.

Reach **Wevonneda Minis** at 937-5705 or wminis@postandcourier.com.

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