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How to pick a reusable tree and be really happy with it

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Bringing a live Christmas tree into your home is like having an extra house guest around for the holidays. You've got to nourish it, clean up after it, keep the pets away from it and carefully prepare for its arrival and departure.

If you'd like one less project to worry about this season, then maybe this is the year to consider bringing an artificial Christmas tree into the fold. After all, if an artificial, or to use the new buzz term, "reusable," tree is good enough for Lenox Square mall's Great Tree, then maybe you'll consider one worthy of your home.



Artificial trees have come a long way from decades ago, when one standing in the corner of a neighbor's living room...

But you can't just wander willy-nilly, find the first artificial tree you see and plunk down a chunk of change. As with live trees, not all reusable trees are created equal. A good-quality artificial tree will start at around \$300 and go upward of \$1,000, depending on the size. But it's an investment that pays for itself in relatively short time when you are plunking down \$4 to \$8 a foot for a "non-reusable" tree.

To make selecting an artificial tree less daunting, we gathered tips from Hillary Zody at Christmas Lights Etc., the Alpharetta-based company that manufactured the Great Tree for Lenox Square.



Fireworks explode in the air above the 56 foot tree during the 66th annual Macy's Great Tree Lighting at Lenox Square...

Reusable tree buying tips:

Always measure. Often when people see a beautiful tree, they're so captivated that they forget how much room they really have at home. This is why it's so important to measure both the ceiling height (remember to leave enough room for a topper — 6 to 12 inches) and space width. Most people know how tall they can go but often forget the width, so a tree that's too wide or full may not fit in the designated area.

Note that trees come in several sizes and shapes called profiles, which include pencil, slender and full, allowing them to fit in a variety of space configurations.

Look for pre-lit trees to save time and money. LED lights save on energy consumption, are cool to the touch and last 90 percent longer than incandescent lights. Some trees come with both clear and multicolored lights, allowing you to change the mood. Select a pre-lit tree with lights that stay lit if one burns out.

The more expensive the tree, the more lights it should have. A good rule is 100 lights per foot of tree, so an 8-foot tree should have at least 800 lights. Many trees include a remote control or foot pedal that turns the lights on and off.

Look for a tree with a heavy-duty frame and stand: make sure the pole and branch hinges are sturdy, not flimsy. The stand should be made of a heavy metal, with the pole fitting snugly inside. The stand should never wobble.

Select a tree with lush, dense greenery. It should have the appearance of a perfect live tree. Gaps or holes within the greenery mean it has a low density in the branches/tips/needles count, and no amount of fluffing will fill in the gaps. The higher the tip count, the fuller the tree, with plenty of tips on which to hang ornaments.

All artificial trees include PVC for needles and tips. But high-end trees will use PVC toward the interior as filler, with Polyethylene, or PE, tips and needles. The PE is used to make injection-molded tips and needles from real trees, with multiple color pigments to create deep color variations that mimic the look and feel of a natural tree.

If stored properly, an artificial tree can last up to 10 years. Invest in a tree storage bag and store in a climate-controlled environment, avoiding moisture and extreme temperatures.