

Published December 18th, 2013

Oh, Christmas Tree

Lamorindans discuss the artificial trend and their own tree traditions

By Amanda Kuehn



Christmas tree in Shelbys Restaurant, Orinda Photo Amanda Kuehn

Now in the throes of December, many Lamorindans are hanging lights, hauling out holly and trimming trees. Though decking the halls was once an activity reserved for Christmas Eve, today the festivities hit early and our trees are often cut down and dolled up long before Dec. 24.

The 25-foot Burton Valley Christmas Tree at the corner where Burton Drive meets Lucas and Silverado in Lafayette is just one of the 35 million that will be decked out in the U.S. this season, according to a survey conducted by Nielsen Research on behalf of the American Christmas Tree Association.

With ties that go back as far as ancient Egypt, fir trees have long been a sign of life and rebirth in the middle of winter. Their association with Christmas began in Germany sometime during the 16th century and eventually spread to France and England, says the Christmas Tree Farm Network (<http://www.christmas-tree.com>). The first Christmas tree in America likely came during the American Revolution, but didn't really catch on until the early 20th century. Originally lit with candles and decorated with candy, paper flowers and communion wafers, modern trees are decked in lights, ribbons, bows and ornaments.

When it comes to trimming trees, everyone has an opinion - colored or white lights, ribbons or ornaments, real or artificial. Artificial trees date back as early as the 19th century, but have only recently become popular in the United States. According to the Nielsen survey, 80 percent of the trees displayed at Christmas last year were artificial, 20 percent real.

In addition to being convenient, artificial trees can also be more environmentally friendly. "Artificial trees may be kept and reused for many years, which would eliminate the gas used for hauling real trees, not to mention the

pesticides and fertilizers needed to grow [them]," said Michael Dawson of Sustainable Lafayette. "A good rule of thumb: if you can use your artificial tree 10 years or more, that's the better option."

"We get real, although I do feel bad," said local artist Susan Oppelt. "We talk about artificial trees and vacuuming up pine needles ... but I love the smell of it and passing on the tradition." Most local residents agree.

"There's nothing better than the real deal," said Margie Pfalzer. "That's the magic of Christmas, to have a tree that you go out and cut down and bring home." Alexis Zwahlen, a student at Miramonte High School, agreed. "For sure real. It's just not Christmas without going with the family to pick out a tree."

If you do opt for a real tree, there are a few things to keep in mind. "Ask if chemicals were used in the growing of the trees, and where they are grown," said Dawson. "Better yet, consider buying a live potted Christmas tree, and use it for outside landscaping when the holidays are over."

Geoff Olmstead of Orchard Nursery in Lafayette estimates that they sell some 650-700 cut trees each season. The trees come from Oregon and are cut down and shipped the week of Thanksgiving. "Most people choose real trees because of the fragrance of them," said Olmstead. "I always do a cut tree. I was born and raised with one, so that's really how I go. They bring the Christmas spirit with them."

Orchard individually cuts each tree so that they stay fresher longer. Olmstead estimates that the average tree can last 6 to 8 weeks. "They need to be fresh cut within 30 minutes of putting them in water or the cells seal," he explained. You can also spray trees with cloud cover or wilt stop, which locks moisture into the needles, but it also takes away the fragrance.

"I can't see myself ever buying an artificial tree," noted Monica Fisher. "The scent is so romantic and so 'Christmasy.' My mom went out and got one once and my dad threw it away." For others the decision is not so important. "I get whatever my wife tells me to," said Dave Greenaway.

Santa Claus, who was visiting Theatre Square in Orinda, gave a similar answer. "We're going to have a real tree, though we haven't gotten it yet," he said. "That's really up to Mrs. Claus."

When asked if he had a preference, Claus paused. "I don't know if I do. There are some artificial trees that

look terrible and some that are nice. People have different situations to respond to," he said knowingly.

Whatever choice you make and however you choose to celebrate, may your holiday season be merry!

For more information on environmentally friendly holiday tips, visit: http://www.sustainablelafayette.org/?page_id=2110.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA