

The Christmas Tree

I consider myself someone who really likes trees. I'm not a tree hugger, but I hate to see a healthy mature tree needlessly removed. After all, a mature tree produces enough oxygen for a family of four. I thought I would share some interesting "facts" (I found them on the internet so they have to be true) about Christmas Trees.

The evergreen fir tree has traditionally been used to celebrate winter festivals for thousands of years. Pagans used branches of it to decorate their homes during the winter solstice, as it made them think of the spring to come. The Romans used Fir Trees to decorate their temples at the festival of Saturnalia. Christians use it as a sign of everlasting life with God.

Nobody is really sure when Fir trees were first used as Christmas trees. It probably started about 1000 years ago in Northern Europe. Many early Christmas Trees seem to have been hung upside down from the ceiling using chains. Other early Christmas Trees, across many parts of northern Europe were cherry or hawthorn plants (or a branch of the plant) that were put into pots and brought inside so they would hopefully flower at Christmas time. If you couldn't afford a real plant, you made pyramids of wood and they were decorated to look like a tree with paper, apples and candles.



The first documented use of a tree at Christmas and New Year celebrations is in town square of Riga, the capital of Latvia, in the year 1510. In the square there is a plaque which is engraved with "The First New Years Tree in Riga in 1510", in eight languages. Not much is known about the tree, apart from that it was attended by men wearing black hats and that after a ceremony they burnt the tree.

The first Christmas Trees came to Britain sometime in the 1830s. They became very popular in 1841, when Prince Albert had a Christmas Tree set up in Windsor Castle. In 1848, a drawing of "The Queen's Christmas tree at Windsor Castle" was published in the Illustrated London News, 1848. The drawing was republished in Godey's Lady's Book, Philadelphia in December 1850. The publication of the drawing helped Christmas Trees become popular in the UK and USA.

In Victorian times, the tree would have been decorated with candles to represent stars. Because of the danger of fire, in 1895 Ralph Morris, an American telephonist, invented the first electric Christmas lights, similar to the ones we use today. In 1885 a hospital in Chicago burned down because of candles on a Christmas Tree! Thank you to Ralph Morris for making Christmas safer! However, the lights on my neighbor's artificial tree started a fire that ruined the inside of their house a few years ago.

Artificial Christmas Trees really started becoming popular in the early 20th century. Over the years artificial trees have been made from feathers, papier mâché, metal, glass, and many different types of plastic.

While watching Shark Tank a few weeks ago, I saw a nurseryman who rents live Christmas trees. Great idea! You get the real tree look and smell, and the tree doesn't have to die.

However you celebrate this season and whatever your symbols of the season are, may it be a joyous one in the company of family and friends.

"Holidays are about experiences and people, and tuning into what you feel like doing at that moment. Enjoy not having to look at a watch."
 — Evelyn Glennie

FAVORITE FLORA: PYRACANTHA COCCINEA- FIRETHORN



fall and winter. These red berries have a bitter taste raw but can be cooked in to jellies and jams.

Firethorn can be grown in full sun to full shade. It is drought tolerant but can tolerate wetter soils near turf and other water loving plants. It is fast growing and resistant to neglect. Most often *Pyracantha coccinea* is trained as espalier (pruning in to a flat two-dimensional form) along a fence or wall but it can be hedged as well. Hidden under the beauty of its colorful flowers and berries are sharp thorns that make this plant excellent for security around fences and windows.

A native to southern Europe and western Asia, Firethorn (*Pyracantha coccinea*) is a plant that is prized for its changing colorful displays throughout the year. Cultivated in gardens in Europe since the 16th century it was introduced to North America in the 18th century. This evergreen shrub has glossy green leaves that grow on a tangled mound of branches 6 to 10 feet in height. Firethorn produces clusters of small white flowers that can almost completely cover the plant. This showy spring display is then topped by the bright red bunches of berries that take their place in the

Photo of the Month



Alaskan Sunset
 Alaska
 Cassi Dawes