Christmas trees

Ever wonder about the origin of the Christmas tree? According to the National Christmas Tree Association, the earliest written record of a Christmas tree was in Riga, Latvia in 1510. A local group of merchants decorated a tree with artificial roses which they associated with the Virgin Mary and then set fire to it.

The first evidence of a Christmas tree in the United States was not until the earliest German settlers. The early pilgrims in 1620 had orthodox beliefs. Christmas was not an official federal holiday until 1870 after the American Revolution. But slightly prior to that in 1851, Christmas trees were sold commercially.

The first president credited for bringing the Christmas tree to the White House as decoration was Franklin Pierce. Today, the White House has 57 decorated trees. In fact, it was not until 1966 that the National Christmas Tree Association presented their grand champion grower's tree to the First Lady.

The first tree to be displayed in the Blue Room was during President Lyndon Johnson's term. This tree was grown by Howard Pierce of Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

In 1901, Theodore Roosevelt was so concerned about the destruction of our forests that he tried to stop the practice of Christmas trees. His own sons fought against this argument and got the support of Gifford Pinchot, a conservationist of the day, to support the theory that thinning the forests was helpful and not harmful.

Today, approximately 25-30 million trees are sold, and most all come from Christmas tree plantations. To save from cutting live trees, the first company to sell an artificial tree was Sears, Roebuck and Company around 1883. They offered a tree with 33 limbs for 50 cents and 55 limbs for $1.

Despite the availability of artificial trees, people began to decimate the natural supply of evergreens. Popular magazines of the day published articles to encourage people to purchase artificial trees instead.

In 1901, the first Christmas tree farm was started in New Jersey by W.V. McGalliard where 25,000 Norway Spruces were planted. In 1930, President Franklin D. Roosevelt started a Christmas tree farm on his estate in Hyde Park, N.Y.

So in preservation of Christmas trees, if you purchase a live tree, you could take cuttings off the tree and root them to start even more trees.

You could purchase a live tree in a container. Not all trees down through history started at floor to ceiling in height, but rather were table top and up to four feet in height. Or you could just purchase an artificial tree and conserve our shrinking habitat. After all, it is the “Going Green” and Sustainability Era.

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