

## Did you get real this Christmas?

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By [Kris Scheuer](#)

Choosing a real tree rather than a fake one to decorate this Christmas gets the nod from foresters and environmental activists alike.

But what's the best way to dispose of that real tree after all the holiday celebrations wind down?

Putting your tree out on regular green bin collection dates in the first two weeks of January means the city will pick it up and reuse it by turning it into wood chips.

Still wondering why cutting down a real tree would get the eco thumbs-up?

Janet McKay, director of the not-for-profit environmental group Local Enhancement of Forest Appreciation, explains the rationale.

"I would have to go with the real tree," she says in early December. "The artificial ones are so toxic ... and having them in your house isn't necessarily good for you.

"A lot of them are made of PVC ... and some of them have lead."

She also encourages people to decorate a tree outside their property rather than cutting down a tree.

According to Richard Ubbens, the city's chief forester, "natural is always better than synthetic plastics".

He said people often throw out artificial trees after a few years, thus littering landfill with a non-biodegradable product. He believes real is the way to go.

"If you are having one up for five to six weeks it's worthwhile and a wonderful thing," he said.

Ubbens suggests purchasing a Christmas tree grown on an Ontarian farm, with little to no pesticides or fertilizers. Locally produced cuts down on the greenhouse gases generated in the transport of trees from places like Quebec, British Columbia and the U.S.

"It's almost along the lines of buying locally grown food to reduce an environmental footprint," he said.

Three popular local choices are Scotch Pine – a fuller tree with longer needles, Balsam Fir with an aromatic scent or White Spruce that needs a lot of water.

Christmas trees are raised for that purpose, often on land that wouldn't support other types of agriculture, says Ubbens.



He suggests putting trees in a base with plenty of water to ensure they don't dry out and become a fire risk, and using LED lights to cut down on electricity.

One place to look for more information on trees grown in province is the website [christmastrees.on.ca](http://christmastrees.on.ca), which also lists locations where you can cut down your own tree.

Carla Grant, executive director of the Ontario Forestry Association is also advocating that people buy a real tree.

“Artificial trees are often transported halfway around the world and are made from a non-biodegradable petroleum-based product that requires a lot of energy during the manufacturing process,” she says.

According to the forestry association, some 500 farmers produce more than a million Christmas trees a year in Ontario.

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