

REAL SIMPLE SETTLES IT

SHOULD YOU GET A REAL OR ARTIFICIAL CHRISTMAS TREE?

Everyone has an opinion! So we collected yours, then asked experts to settle the debate once and for all.

BY LESLIE CORONA

Real All the Way!

“Always real. Accept no substitutes.”

ANNA LEIGH, LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

“There is just something about going out to the farm and walking the fields to pick the perfect tree.

Plus, it supports local businesses!”

CHARITY, WATERVILLE, MAINE

“I don’t have the storage space for an artificial one.”

EMILY, CINCINNATI

Faux for Sure!

“Fake—due to allergies. I do miss that real-tree aroma, but I also love the ease of the fake tree.”

CAROL, OCEAN VIEW, DELAWARE

“We got real trees in the past...until a spider nest hatched literally hundreds of baby spiders. They were everywhere. This year we have a beautiful artificial tree. No watering, no spiders.”

 @LIBRAGIRL1009

“I love the convenience of having the lights already on it.”

 @BROOKERATHBUNREALESTATEAGENT

We asked on Instagram, and 55 percent of commenters prefer real trees.



The Verdict

The answer is clear-cut: Real trees come out on top! Let’s start with safety. A parched tree can go up in flames in less than a minute if it’s too close to a heat source. Scary? Yes. Common? No! On average, there are 160 tree fires a year, according to the National Fire Protection Association, and a well-watered tree is at lower risk. What about our fur babies? While the needles and water in the stand could be harmful, “it’s rare that a pet would eat enough of your tree to become sick,” says Megan Conrad, a veterinarian with Hello Ralphie, a pet telehealth company. (A properly fitted tree skirt will help keep whiskers out of the water.)

Moving on to the environmental impact. Right now you can’t fully recycle artificial trees, and one that’s no longer usable will likely end up in a landfill. But fake trees are often in circulation for decades, says Mac Harman, CEO of Balsam Hill, an artificial tree retailer. And Jami Warner, executive director of the American Christmas Tree Association, an industry trade group, contends that an artificial tree used for at least five years will have a slightly smaller carbon footprint than a new, real one you drive in your car to go buy. Still, it’s hard to forget that a plastic tree takes centuries to degrade. Also: “Farmers plant a tree for each one that’s harvested,” says Tim O’Connor, executive director of the National Christmas Tree Association, which represents Christmas tree farmers and affiliated businesses.

Finally, there’s the festiveness of a real tree. The joy of picking one out! The scent! If you really can’t have one (maybe you’re allergic, your building won’t allow it, etc.), Kate Lester, an interior designer in Hermosa Beach, California, says to shop in person for an artificial tree if possible: “Make sure the needles are not too shiny.” You don’t want to just hope *fir* the best here. ■