

HOLIDAY Traditions

Shopping For Artificial Christmas Trees

(NAPSA)—For hundreds of years, the Christmas tree has been a popular symbol of the holidays. Recently, artificial trees have gained in popularity for their practicality. In 2006, 56 percent of homes that celebrated the holidays with a Christmas tree used an artificial tree, according to a poll by the artificial tree industry. Artificial trees are easy to set up, they don't need water, they don't shed and they can last for years.

Thomas Harman, CEO of Balsam Hill, a company specializing in artificial trees, offers these tips for selecting an artificial tree.

1. The Lights

Untangling and stringing the lights makes setting up a tree difficult. Ninety percent of the artificial trees bought last year were pre-lit.

"Look for 100 lights per foot," says Harman. "A seven-foot tree, the standard for most homes, should have at least 700 lights on it."

2. The Realism

Today's artificial trees are often molded from polyethylene, or PE. PE trees have the best quality, color and shape.

"Our True Needle BH Balsam Fir looks just like a real balsam fir in color and needle shape," says Harman.

Shoppers can view and buy a variety of PE trees based on real-tree varieties at www.balsamhill.com.

For less money, shoppers can opt for something less realistic but still good quality. Look for branches with a mix of brown and different shades of green in the branch. Or try a different color altogether.



Artificial trees are now so realistic that they can mimic real tree varieties like this Vermont White Spruce.

Sites such as www.treetopia.com offer tinsel trees in fun colors.

3. Warranty

Even if you spend a lot for the most realistic, pre-lit tree, it will last for years and save you money over time. A good tree should last at least 10 years. Look for a good manufacturer with a warranty of no less than five years on the tree and no less than three years on the lights.

Proper storage will also extend the life of the tree. Most manufacturers will provide a storage bag for the tree. Balsam Hill also recommends storing the tree in its shipping box to prevent crushing it in storage.