

The Christmas Tree

Bringing greenery into the house in winter time goes back to pagan times but it is believed that it was in Germany in the 16th century before a tree was used as part of the Christmas celebration. It took another few hundred years (the late 19th century) before Christmas trees became more commonplace.

Most Christmas trees are real trees that have been grown especially for this purpose. Other are made from artificial materials to look like a real tree.

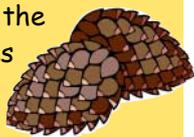
There are a few species of tree that are commonly used as Christmas trees in Ireland - examples are Noble Fir, Norway Spruce, Nordmann Fir and Lodgepole Pine. Some species are more popular than others, especially the varieties that are slow to shed their leaves when they are cut and dry out.



Conifers & Cones

The type of trees used as Christmas trees are known as conifers. This means that they carry their seeds in cones. Cones vary in size and shape, depending on the species of tree, and are a safe place for the tree to make and store their seeds until they are ready to shed them. As the cones dry out, the scales of the cone open and the seeds pop out.

Cones are popular decorations at Christmas and at other times of the year.



Evergreen

A *real* Christmas tree is usually an evergreen tree, which meaning it does not shed its leaves in winter. Its long, thin, needle-like leaves slow down water evaporation so trees with these type of leaves do not need as much water. For this reason, they often grow in places where other trees cannot.



Farming Christmas Trees

Real Christmas trees in Ireland are planted especially for the purpose of harvesting them at Christmas time. They are grown like any other farmed crop and tree farmers usually replace the trees they cut down in



December with seedlings in January, starting the cycle all over again. Some people use a living tree in a pot at Christmas time, bringing the tree back into the garden when the festivities are over. Eventually the tree will outgrow the pot and will need to be planted outside. It is important to know how big the tree will eventually become as your garden might not have room for a fully-grown tree!

Recycling a Christmas tree

After Christmas, as a *real* Christmas tree no longer has a root, it will begin to wilt and decay and will need to be disposed of. Many recycling centres encourage households to bring their Christmas tree to them so that it can be shredded (broken up into really small pieces). This material is then called mulch, which is great for preventing weed-growth around trees and shrubs in the garden. This is a great example of recycling (see the pyramid on page 6). Just remember to remove the Christmas decorations first!

