

Origin of Christmas tree

The selecting and purchasing of a tree plays a key role in today's Christmas festivities. Though the Christmas tree is an integral part of the modern day celebration this was not always the

case. The earliest historical reference of the Christmas tree was made in the sixteenth century, in Latvia and Estonia. In both countries, members of the local merchants' guild carried an ever-

green tree, decorated with roses, to the market place. There, they would dance around the tree and eventually set fire to it. However it was Germany, not Latvia or Estonia which introduced

the Christmas tree to North America. By the seventeenth century it was a common sight to see German homes with an evergreen placed in the centre of a table decorated with apples. As time passed on, the

popularity of Christmas trees increased, bringing with it a variety of decorations and accessories. The Christmas tree tradition spread across America via the German immigrants. The first tree on record was in 1747, in Pennsylvania and from there the idea extended across Philadelphia, Massachusetts, Illinois, Virginia and New York. In 1860 the Americans developed the first floor-to-ceiling Christmas tree.

By the beginning of the twentieth century one family in five had their own tree, and over the next ten years the tradition became a universal part of the North American Christmas celebration.

With the numerous and easily available evergreens in Canada, Canadian families soon adopted this age old tradition, and before long the Christmas tree was a familiar part of the festive season. Today, the natural, lifelike Christmas trees found in many homes are

artificial. Almost one out of ever four Canadian families shopping for Christmas trees now chooses the artificial kind. The Christmas Council estimates Christmas tree sales will surpass 1,000,000 this year and that 250,000 of these trees will be artificial. Beauty, convenience, economy, and safety are some of the many reasons why artificial trees have become so popular across North America.

There is a wide and varied collection of Christmas trees available, designed to meet the desires of even the most discriminating consumer. From the 12 inch table top model to the eight foot giant, there is a style and size for everyone.

With minimal care, these trees should last anywhere between 10 to 15 years. When storing

them after the holiday season place the branches in layers, in the original box to prevent them from being crushed.

The artificial tree is easy to assemble and decorate. It comes complete with stand, trunk and adjustable branches for individual shaping, opening up a host of decorating ideas for the purchaser.

Wise consumers look for artificial trees that are fire retardant and that list their lighting specifications. For the energy conscious buyer, there is a vast array of attractive and festive minilights and 5 watt regular size indoor light sets. With all the advantages associated with artificial trees, it is little wonder that many people are buying more than one of these trees for their homes.

Global yuletide customs

Mistletoe, Santa Claus, letters to Santa, Christmas customs galore—where did they all begin?

The customs of Christmas come from many lands and many eras. They evolve from pagan ceremonies into Christian rituals. And they stretch from West to East, from North to South, as each country contributes something special and traditional to

the celebrations of the holiday.

When seasonal gaiety rings out in Canada, the merriment is echoed in Mexico. When North or South Americans gather for Christmas festivities, the people of Sweden are doing the same—and so are the peoples of Holland and France and Italy and Spain and countless other European countries.

In the far East, Christian communities spread the customs of Christmas, which mingle with the year-end ceremonies observed by those of other faiths.

That the legend and lore of Christmas knows no boundaries is illustrated in the following round-up of Yuletide customs, based on information provided by the editors of the Encyclopedia International.

Holland custom
For St. Nicholas season, it's traditional in Holland to make flat cakes called *Klassjes*. Once exclusively made in the form of the bishop, St. Nicholas, *Klassjes* now take any form of bird, beast or fish.

Wotan, leads the parade. He is followed by Father Christmas, who is decked with ribbons and carries candy and fruit.

A Swiss custom that dates back to the Middle Ages is to start the New Year free of debts. December 6th, the feast of St. Nicholas of Myra, is the day set to meet all monetary obligations such as rents and mortgages.

Custom of writing letters to Santa Claus may have begun in Austria, where, long ago, it was an Advent tradition for children to write letters containing lists of what they'd like to receive on St. Nicholas' Day.

From Italy comes a most poetic addition to Christmas lore. For three weeks during the Christmas season, children traditionally go from place to place reciting Christmas poems. They expect coins in return, to buy holiday goodies.

In Sweden an ancient custom that is still observed in some Swedish households today is that of "dipping bread into the pot." Each person dips a piece of bread into pork and sausage drippings and eats it for good luck.

A procession which blends pagan and Christmas customs is part of the legend and lore of the holiday in Ruppun, Germany. A rider on a white horse, symbolizing the horse of the pagan god



Great gift idea: make Yule candles

Here is a bright idea! Make your own candles as gifts or table decorations this Christmas.

All you need is a half-gallon cardboard milk carton, a 10-inch candle, 1½-lbs. of paraffin, three trays of ice cubes.

Cut the top from the carton and rinse thoroughly. Crack the ice cubes into medium and

large pieces, drain off any water, and return to the freezer. Melt the paraffin in a double boiler. When all the wax is hot, centre the candle in the carton and surround it loosely with cracked ice.

Quickly pour all the hot paraffin over the ice.

Let it cool for half an hour. Cut the carton down the sides and peel it away. The carton's plastic coating keeps it from sticking.

There's your candle, ready to decorate for the festive season.

Carolling, mass are tradition

In the mountain regions of Western Australia, entire villages join in carol singing on Christmas Eve. Beginning with the family living farthest from the village church, torch-bearing carollers form a procession. At each house along the way greetings of "Froehliche Weihnachten" are exchanged, and the inhabitants fall in line. Eventually, the whole population is part of the parade as it arrives at the church steps in time for Midnight Mass.

Christmas Eve carol-singing and Midnight Mass are also a part of the British holiday tradition. The custom of hanging up mistletoe dates back to the Druids, who used the plant in religious rites.

Burning the Yule log is another custom borrowed by the British from the Vikings.



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