



O CHRISTMAS TREE: Christine Cole, manager of Tuitman's Garden Centre, checks out some of the white spruce trees for sale for Christmas. Choosing a Christmas tree has a lot to do with family traditions as well as attitudes towards the environment.

Every Christmas tree is different

BY KAREN WETMORE
The Acton Tanner

Choosing a Christmas tree can be an exciting experience. But do you really know what you're getting?

Is it a pine, a spruce or a fir tree, and what makes them different from each other? And just how good are artificial trees, anyway?

Scotch pines are the biggest sellers at Tuitman's Garden Centre, says manager Christine Cole. The trees' long needles and fairly strong branches make it a good choice for hanging heavier decorations and they're usually the least expensive type of Christmas tree.

But a Scotch pine can't match the finer beauty of a white pine, with its "beautiful long, soft needles," says Barb Vos of Northern Hardwood. Some people buy a white pine and decorate it with light gold bows, giving it an elegant look, she added. The larger they get, the more likely a Scotch pine's stem will bend, while spruce trees are known for their straight stem and good overall shape.

A white spruce is a short-needled evergreen with stiffer branches than a pine tree, explains Cole. Spruce trees have sharper needles, which also fall off faster than any other type of Christmas tree. But many families choose

this type of tree because of the smell of spruce, or because it's become a holiday tradition.

At the high end for cost are balsam and Fraser fir trees. Both are short needled, and softer than spruce trees. The Fraser firs are a slightly deeper green than balsam, and both types are two-toned, says Vos. Though they may cost more, balsam firs keep their needles on the branches longest.

With the increase in environmental awareness, more and more people are choosing artificial trees. They're easy to put up and take down and require no care, such as watering or vacuuming fallen needles. And since many are guaranteed for 10 years, they will end up saving you money, says Charlie Kinal of Home Hardware.

"Some of the new ones are incredibly real looking," he adds.

When buying an artificial tree, check on the box for the number of branch tips on the tree to tell you how full it is. A tree with 1,500 branch tips, "is a really great tree," says Kinal.

Artificial trees are fireproofed, although there is little chance for a fresh cut tree to catch fire either.

Still, for some it's just not the same if the tree doesn't have that evergreen smell to it. A third option is available for people who want a real tree, but don't want to kill a tree. Tuitman's offers potted pine and spruce trees which can be planted outside after Christmas. These can only be kept inside for about 10 days, compared to up to three weeks for cut trees. "The cost is more than a Christmas tree without the roots," says Cole. "But then you get a tree to plant and keep."

Student advises young women to Fly Higher

An Acton High student is showing other young women how to Fly Higher, through the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario.

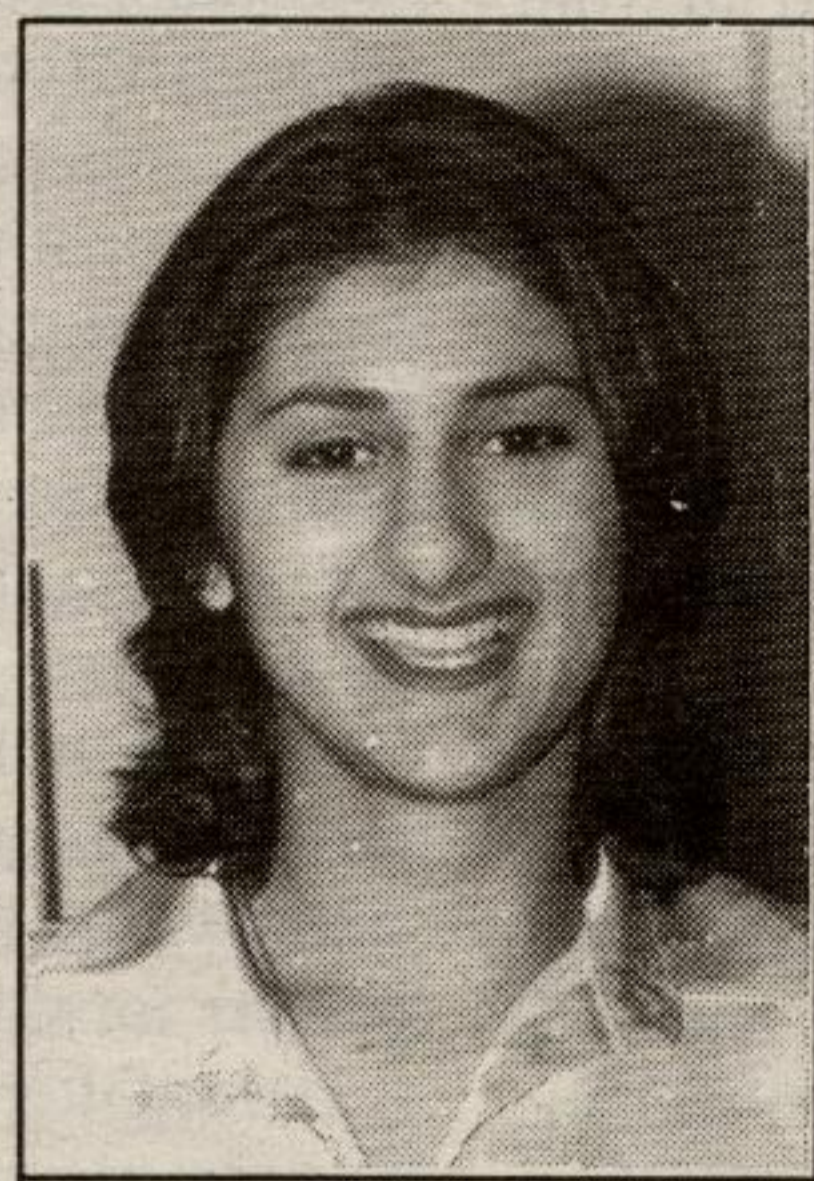
Denise Katsilieris, 16, is one of 20 facilitators chosen across the province to lead workshops on how to improve the lifestyle choices available to young women.

This includes choosing to quit or to not start smoking. While tobacco use for men has dropped 43 per cent in the last 20 years, the women's rate has gone down by only 18 per cent.

Katsilieris spent a recent Saturday in Milton with another facilitator giving high school representatives from six high schools ideas on how to improve the health and attitudes of their peers.

"Fly Higher is a chance to educate young women on the facts of healthy lifestyles and smoking and give them the support and skills to make healthy choices for themselves," says Katsilieris.

The Grade 11 student hopes to bring what she's learned about good health to her peers at AHS, perhaps in a similar workshop as the one in Milton. As heart disease and stroke is the number one killer of women in Canada, it's an important message to spread, especially to young



DENISE KATSILIERIS

women.

"Being young and female can be tough but having a healthy image of one's self and the support in school and at home can make all the difference in the world," Katsilieris says.

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