

Christmas Trees

Christmas is a time when many people participate in different traditions around the world. Many people who celebrate Christmas believe that the Christmas tree is an essential part of the festivities and trees of different shapes, sizes and varieties are put on display in anticipation of Christmas Day. Many people prefer having a real Christmas tree in their house as they emit a beautiful, woodland scent. There are different types of evergreen trees that are traditionally used during the festive season and varieties include fir and spruce trees.

What Is the History of Christmas Trees?

Thousands of years ago, Pagans used branches of evergreen trees to adorn their homes during the winter solstice (the day when there is the least amount of daylight). The branches symbolised everlasting life and the hope that spring would come again next year.

It is believed that Germany is responsible for the Christmas tree tradition that we know today. In the 16th century, Christians bought real fir trees into the home and adorned them with decorations. During this time, trees were lit up with candles on the branches. Some people believe that Martin Luther, a 16th-century Protestant reformer, is responsible for this custom. It is thought that he was awestruck by the beauty of twinkling stars through the evergreens while walking through the woodland one evening and he wanted to recreate the scene for his family.



The Royal Family have been instrumental in terms of popularising the Christmas tree. George III married Queen Charlotte, who was raised in Germany, and she is believed to have brought the first decorated evergreen Christmas tree into the Queen's Lodge in Windsor in 1800. Although Queen Charlotte is credited by many historians as bringing the first decorated Christmas trees into England, they were made popular by Queen Victoria's husband (Prince Albert), who was also from Germany. In 1848, an engraving of the Royal Family was published in *The Illustrated London News*

which depicted the family celebrating around the Christmas tree. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were believed to have decorated the tree themselves with candles and gingerbread. As Queen Victoria was deemed very popular, this tradition took off and made having a Christmas tree in the home very fashionable in Britain. During this time, decorations included paper ornaments, fruit or sweets. Later on, glass baubles became popular and the use of the newly invented electric lights were a much safer alternative to candles.

How Do People Decorate Their Christmas Trees?

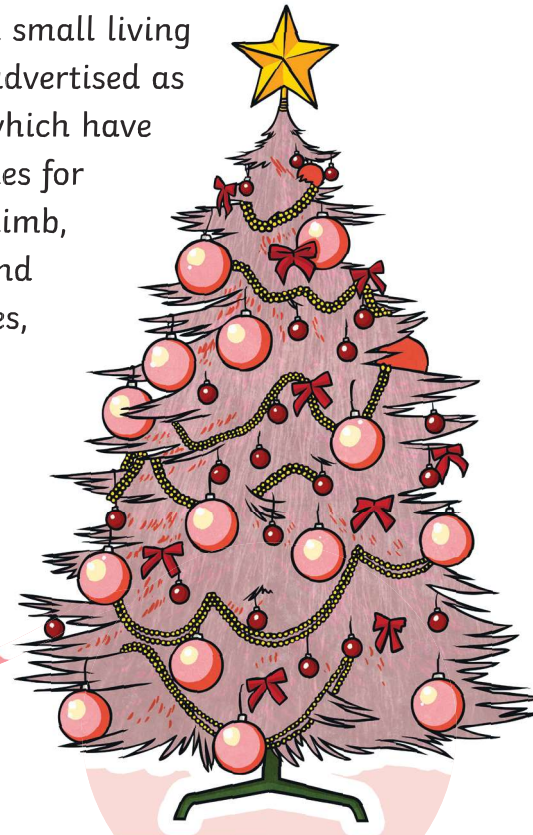
Nowadays, Christmas trees are decorated with a range of items such as coloured baubles, lights, tinsel, ribbons, beads or bunting; traditionally, they are topped with a star or an angel. Many families choose to have a Christmas colour theme for their tree, such as silver, red or gold. Normally, Christmas presents are placed under the tree, ready to open on Christmas Day in the morning.



What Types of Artificial Christmas Trees Are There?

The invention of the artificial tree meant that you could reuse it every year and there wasn't a worry about it losing all its needles before Christmas Day. Today, fibre-optic Christmas trees can also be purchased; some even rotate and play music. In recent years, companies have become more innovative with their designs of artificial trees; there are Christmas trees that hang from the ceiling, 'half trees' to

save space in small living areas, trees advertised as 'cat-proof', which have fewer branches for animals to climb, and bright and colourful trees, such as neon pink designs!



Why Is There a Christmas Tree in Trafalgar Square?

Some villages, towns and cities may have their own Christmas tree in public places; these trees are usually decorated with lights and are much larger than those bought for the home. Annually since 1947, the people of Norway have given the people of London a Christmas tree, which is displayed in Trafalgar Square. It is gifted to recognise Britain's support for Norway during the Second World War. The tree is brought to the UK by sea before completing its journey by lorry. Finally, it is erected in the square using a hydraulic crane.



Questions

1. Which of the following trees are evergreen? Tick **two**.

- beech
- spruce
- willow
- fir

2. Underline **one** word in the quotation below that suggests that the companies are forward-thinking.

In recent years, companies have become more innovative with their designs of artificial trees.

3. Look at the sub-heading **Why Is There a Christmas Tree in Trafalgar Square?** Find and copy one word which means the same as 'put up'.

4. Fill in the missing words.

Thousands of years ago, _____ used branches of evergreen trees to adorn their homes during the winter _____.

5. Who is believed to have brought the first decorated Christmas tree into the Queen's Lodge in Windsor?

6. Explain how Christmas decorations have changed over time.

7. **It is thought that he was awestruck by the beauty of twinkling stars through the evergreens...**

What impression does the author give by the use of the word 'awestruck'?

8. Why do you think someone may buy a Christmas tree to hang from the ceiling?

9. Predict how Christmas tree designs may develop in the future.

10. Tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
In the past, candles were lit on Christmas trees.		
Fir and spruce are types of evergreen trees.		
It is thought that Spain is responsible for the Christmas tree tradition that we know today.		
Some companies design 'half trees' at Christmas.		
Norway have gifted London a Christmas tree since 1963.		