

O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum

By Cynthia Brian

"Christmas trees come very close to exceeding nature." ~Andy Rooney



A modern Currier and Ives cozy Christmas living room. Photos Cynthia Brian

When my children were youngsters, cutting a tree was the big event of the season. We'd don our Santa hats, grab a bundle of rope to tie the tree to the top of the car, put film in the camera, and off we'd go, singing Christmas carols while plotting our adventure. It could take hours walking through a farm, checking out tree after tree, debating the merits of each. Sometimes we'd visit two or three farms before finding the perfect one. Afterwards, at home with our freshly cut treasure, we'd light a fire, drink hot cocoa and eggnog, eat persimmon pudding and Italian panetone, put on the Christmas music, and dance around the house as we spruced the fir with popcorn and cranberry strings, homemade ornaments, tinsel, and of course, plenty of twinkling lights.

One day my son had the bright idea that we should grow our own Christmas trees in order to have a never-ending supply of Yuletide enchantment. With the best planting season for evergreens between January and March, as soon as the small containers of conifers went on sale for \$1 post holiday, we nabbed 20 for our forthcoming

Christmas tree farm. We chose a prime spot at the top of our hill, prepared the plot, cleared the weeds, planted the seedlings, protected them with wire from marauding munchers, maintained soil moisture, and waited. The kids were very attentive to their trees. By year three, pruning and shaping the trees into conical forms began. Who knew that "Christmas trees" didn't automatically grow into perfect Christmas specimens? By year 7, they cut their first glorious imperfect tree and by year 13 all of the trunks were too large for any tree holder. Instead of cutting another tree, we potted a large Norfolk pine, added it to our entrance, where this oxygen producing, carbon dioxide absorber has served as our beloved *arbre de Noel*.

History, legend, or a combination of the two chronicles the tales of 16th century Germans bringing evergreens into their homes as holiday decor after Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, witnessed the stars sparkling through the forest trees and cut a tree to enjoy indoors. In 1848, Christmas trees are as significant to American culture as apple pie. But it wasn't until 1848 that Puritanical America embraced the idea of the "pagan" Christmas tree. The ever-popular Queen Victoria and her German Prince Albert were sketched with their children gathered around a decorated Christmas tree and East Coast society adopted this new fashionable trend. Currier and Ives jumped on the bucolic family festivity bandwagon by immortalizing vintage America in historic lithographs of cozy Christmas scenes including sleigh rides, crackling fires, candlelit chapels, snowmen, and tree decorating.

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Tagged and wired Christmas trees fill a garden center.



Decorating a winter garden as a Christmas wonderland.

Photos Cynthia Brian