

## Permaculture in Practice

# Compost, burn dead tree in your living room

More than six out of 10 residential Christmas trees in the United States are fake, but if you're reading this, chances are your holiday conifer was cut. If you went with a live tree, you made the best environmental choice, as long as you have an appropriate place to plant it and provided that you get off your butt and dig your hole. A live tree will die if it bakes too long in your heated home.

Growing up on the seventh story of an apartment building in New York City, our cut tree was always a cherished hint of nature that helped brighten our lives during the Holidays. But ever since moving here almost 20 years ago I've never had to act, personally, on that now famous "Green" Christmas tree question: "What'll it be, Mac? Live, cut, or polyvinyl chloride?"

In the past, if we weren't enjoying the trees that my parents or in-laws had, we'd either get a live one or use a houseplant. For many years we used an arboreal, prickle-free cactus left behind by some friends who moved to Hawaii. My all-time favorite was a five gallon, conical rosemary plant from Santa Fe Greenhouses, which still rages in an herb spiral off-Agua Fria.

With two little kids now and no trip to Florida to visit Nana and Papa, my wife and I had to make a choice. Getting a live tree was out of the question because, according to our landscape plan, there was no room in the inn for another evergreen. We could have arranged to plant something at one of our clients' properties, but it just felt like there was too much going on this year to juggle that.

Getting an artificial tree even from the nice folks at Big Jo Hardware was also a non-starter. Sure, you can seem like a perfect environmentalist by re-using your ersatz conifer year after year, but 99.9 percent of such trees are made out of PVC. In addition to generating dioxins during production, plastic trees are typically softened by phthalates that have been



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scleroderma and a slew of other nasties.

In October a friend told us about a forest scheduled for a burn in early June. He planned to truck in with a new nonprofit organization and a crew of at-risk teens. When the deal fell through just after Thanksgiving, Delancey Street began to beckon. After all, I could, as a good workout, hoof the mega-fetish up to our house. Of course, composting the needles to raise the acidity in our ever-alkaline garden would be a plus, and, sure, we could always use another log or two for the fire. "Hey," we beamed, "we'll heat our home while supporting a worthy nonprofit." We'd have all the answers should any of our eco-freak friends slide in something snide. "Plus," we were planning to say, "We walked it here, so at least no fossil fuels were used in picking up the doomed thing."

Too bad it was delivered from a farm in Oregon.

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