



# Artificial Christmas Tree Buyer's Guide

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*There are many factors to consider when purchasing an artificial Christmas tree. This guide will give you a brief overview of the components, design methods and other considerations to help you make an informed decision in selecting a tree that fits your budget but most importantly will provide years of enjoyment.*

## Why an artificial tree makes so much sense.

Today there are nearly 3 times as many artificial trees sold than real trees! Some of the reasons so many people have embraced the lifelike tree are....

- \* Reduced risk of fire
- \* Less expensive per year
- \* No need to water
- \* Easier to put up and take down
- \* Ability to leave the tree up longer
- \* Little or no cleanup
- \* Non-Allergenic
- \* No "bad side" or crooked trunks
- \* **And the main reason....most come with commercial grade light sets professionally installed.**

## How to start your search

### Consider the location

How tall are your ceilings? Most homes have 8' ceilings which are actually 7'8". This is the reason 7 1/2 foot trees are the number one selling size. However, many newer homes have 9', 10' and even higher vaulted or cathedral ceilings.

How much floor space do you have to work with? The distance between furniture, windows, doors, traffic areas and proximity to an electrical outlet should all be considered. There are many different tree profiles so it should be easy to find a balance between height and diameter that fits your needs.





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## Tech Talk

How are the needles, tips and branches made?

Most trees are made of either PVC (poly vinyl chloride) or PE (poly ethylene).

PVC trees originate from sheets of PVC which are slit and twisted around 2 wires to create the individual tips or leaves. The tips can be made using 1, 1.5, 2 and 3 plies/layers of PVC. There are also a variety of thicknesses ranging from .07 to .14mm. The more plies and heavier gauge used will determine how full the tips are and how well they will maintain their fullness over the years.

The tips are then either hand tied to a branch rod or twisted between 2 more wires. The hand tied method is preferred because the single steel rod is sturdier and because it is a manual process all of the tips point in the right direction...up. The branches are then attached to hinges (assuming it is a fold-up tree) and the rows of branches attached to the pole section. Note: There are 3 types of hinges, plastic, metal using pins and one piece metal. One piece metal is considered the most durable because there are no breakable parts.

PE trees start with a completely different process. The leaves or tips are molded of poly ethylene which creates the most lifelike appearance possible. PE tips can be molded to match any live tree branch and custom colored as well. Because it is much more labor intensive, PE trees are generally more expensive than PVC. After the molding process the construction is the same as a hand tied PVC tree. Note: When making PE trees, most manufacturers use PVC tips on the inside of the tree to keep a full appearance and help hold down costs. The ratio of PE tips to PVC will not only determine the cost but will also determine how life-like the tree looks.



*PVC (poly vinyl chloride)*



*PE (poly ethylene)*



*Balanced Lighting*



*Clumps of Light*

ing of the air in the bulb, in essence they have become disposable sets. Use it for a season and if it doesn't work next year spend \$1.99 to replace it. But when a light set is attached to a tree it becomes a component of an item costing hundreds of dollars. That's why it is important to know the specifications of the lights on the tree before you buy.

## Lights

Pre-Lighted trees have become the most popular type of tree sold. With a commercial grade light set, they offer convenience, balanced illumination with minimal wiring showing. A typical light set sold off the shelf is built mainly for price. The manufacturers use short spacing between bulbs to save copper costs, inferior filaments, poor vacuum-

What is the spacing between bulbs? 9"-10" spacing allows for more balanced lighting with less wire showing. Shorter spacing costs less but will expose wires and result in "clumps of light".



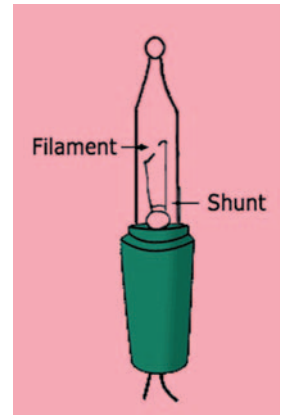
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What is the milliamp rating of the filament? 170-200ma are longer lasting than their counterparts of 120ma. 120ma bulbs are sometimes advertised as energy saving but for the pennies saved the bulb life is reduced by 30% or more.

How many lights are on the tree? More lights does not always mean better lighting. The key is to match the light count to the construction style of the tree. Traditional, triangular shaped trees generally require less lights than irregular, indexed trees. The best way to determine how well a tree is lit is to stand about 10 feet away and squint your eyes so the lights go out of focus. This will make any dark areas on the tree stand out.

What kind of lights are on the tree? Regular incandescent miniature bulbs are still the most popular but LED lights and variety of styles that “promise” to never go out are becoming more popular. The advantages of LED lights are longer life and lower energy consumption. The disadvantages are most LED bulbs are not replaceable so when a bulb burns out its out for ever, the colors are cold not warm like incandescent lighting and the sets are very expensive. The sets that promise to be fool proof or never go out need careful analysis. Some provide very limited protection like if you pull a bulb out the rest stay on but they provide little or no protection against the number one cause of light set failure which is shunt failure. The shunt is an aluminum wire that keeps the connection alive if a filament burns out. See diagram. Because almost all miniature light sets are wired in series, if the filament burns out and the shunt fails, the entire set will go out. Many people would believe the light set has “gone bad” because this problem is very difficult to isolate. The reality is light sets don't just “go bad” but light bulbs do. Your dealer can provide more details on the various light set technologies.



## Storage

To protect your investment, store your tree away from extreme heat or cold. Be certain to protect the tree from dust, moisture and insects. The original carton is generally suitable for repacking the tree however, it will require the tree to be completely folded back to its original condition meaning extra time each year shaping or fluffing the tips and an increased risk of damaging a light set. Most specialty retailers sell fabric containers that allow the tree to be loosely folded for storage. This makes the tree easier to carry and allows for quicker set-up the following year.

## Warranty

Most trees come with some kind of warranty, usually 10-15 years structural and 1-3 years on light sets. Some things to consider are how the warranty is handled. Who services the tree if something goes wrong? Do you have to mail it back to the manufacturer or will the retailer service it. What exactly is covered? How do you get service if the tree is out of warranty and something goes wrong? How much information is included with the tree to help repair routine problems on your own?

A lifelike Christmas tree should be treated as a long term investment. A premium, high quality tree will last for many years and more importantly, maintain its good looks over time. Considering a 10 year life span, just a few dollars per year could make all the difference in the level of enjoyment your tree provides.