

Winter!

# Christmas Trees

*Many teachers bring branches from local evergreens into their classrooms for decoration before school breaks for the Christmas holidays. They may even be fortunate enough to have a live or freshly cut tree either in the room or in the front hallway of the school.*

*The following notes may help you as the teacher bring some fascinating and useful information to your students about Christmas trees long ago and the trees produced here in British Columbia today.*



Since ancient times Christmas trees have been a part of mans' festive celebrations during the winter season. Even before Christian traditions people of ancient lands brought pieces of evergreen plants and trees into their homes. Many believed that these boughs would keep away evil spirits and illness.

The shortest day and longest night of the year is called the winter solstice. In North America that falls between December 21 and 22. In ancient times the sun was considered a god. Ancient people believed that as the days grew shorter it meant that the sun was feeling poorly. When the days started to get longer during the winter solstice they knew the sun was feeling better. They would then decorate with evergreen boughs to remind them of the plentiful days of summer that lay ahead.

The Romans would celebrate the solstice with a feast in honour of the god of Agriculture, Saturn. This was a special time when everyone, slaves and masters, would feast together and exchange gifts. The ancient Druids of Europe decorated again with evergreen boughs but this time as a symbol of life that was everlasting.

Great Britons were the first to bring in the "Yule Log". Families worked together to drag a large log into the hearth where it would burn for the 12 days of Christmas.

For more information on Christmas trees check out:  
[www.christmastrees.on.ca](http://www.christmastrees.on.ca)  
[www.realtrees4kids.org/index.htm](http://www.realtrees4kids.org/index.htm)

Rules about the lighting of the log and saving the coals were closely followed less bad luck fall on the family.

The Christmas colours of red and green came from a German tradition when red apples were carefully hung on green pine trees in celebration of Adam and Eve's Day, December 24. Later the trees were filled with candies shaped like fruits and vegetables or gingerbread cookies carefully nestled in the boughs.

It was a German baron who first introduced the Christmas tree into Canada . In 1781, in the small village of Sorel, Quebec he decorated a giant balsam fir with white candles. Almost 80 years later the next record of a Christmas tree was from Halifax where a rich merchant decorated a huge tree to please his German wife.

The people in British Columbia are diverse. Whether Christian or not many enjoy Christmas trees as a part of their holiday celebration.

In BC the primary type of Christmas tree is the Douglas fir. Others include the Grand fir, Noble fir, Subalpine fir, Scotch pine, and White pine, as well as various spruces. All are native species with excellent fragrance and slender needles suitable for hanging Christmas ornaments.

Each year about 500,000 trees are harvested from Christmas tree farms located in the Kootenays, Fraser Valley, on Vancouver Island and in the

[www.agf.gov.bc.ca](http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca)  
[www.bcfarmfresh.com](http://www.bcfarmfresh.com)

Thompson and Okanagan areas as well as Prince George, Terrace and Smithers.

Seeds are planted in greenhouses. One-year-old seedlings are planted and grown on to be harvested in 6-10 years. Modern farming techniques are used to produce nicely shapes trees. All Christmas trees are coniferous—the name conifer means "cone bearer". All coniferous trees hold their seeds in cones. Conifers are also called evergreens since they hold on to their needles (leaves) all year long. The needles are covered in a natural wax to help the needle hold moisture and keep from freezing.

Christmas trees hold their value even after Christmas. Trees are made up of carbon and nitrogen – important nutrients for other plants and trees. Through shredding and composting these nutrients can be recycled back into the soil.



# Christmas Tree Care

## At School

*A Christmas tree should never dry out. By following these simple steps your tree will stay fresh right until Christmas break.*

- Cut 1cm off the base of the tree—making a clean cut will let the tree absorb water more efficiently
- Set the tree in a sturdy, deep container
- Keep the bottom of the tree

immersed in water at all times—daily watering is important. A deep container is necessary for a constant supply of water over the weekend.

- Place the tree in a cool place away from any heat sources
- Remove the tree from the school before the break

### Additional tips:

Decorate with mini lights—they produce very little heat and are energy efficient. Never use outdoor light sets or strands of lights that are in disrepair.

Evergreen boughs should be used in the classroom only for a short period of time. They will dry out and can become a fire hazard.

### Use these trees templates for:

- Christmas cards (increase the size and cut out the pair)
- gift tags (cut out just one, hole punch the star and insert a string)
- garlands (cut out and fasten together in a long strand)

