



Oh, Christmas Tree!

Trimming the tree as a family builds bonds, memories and traditions.

by Donald Fraser

If there is one magical moment that truly brings a family together during the holiday season it has to be the trimming of the tree. Sure, Christmas morning is always alive with excitement, with kids bouncing off the walls, ready to shred wrapping paper and discover what those North Pole elves were up to this year.

But it is the more low-key decorating of the tree that often builds the strongest family bonds, memories, and traditions.

There's the fun of hunting for just the right tree on a cold winter morning. The warm smell of woody pine, and the comforting taste of hot chocolate or eggnog. The bright lights and garlands. The candlelit smiles and shared family voices as you rediscover Christmas carols. And the oohs and aaahs as each family member unveils yet another forgotten ornament and hangs it on the tree.

Here, local families share some of their best tree trimming stories and ideas to get you in the spirit.

Christmas chopping

Seven years ago, Kendal, single mother of two, was starting a new life in a new town. She was determined to provide a memorable Christmas for her kids, ages 2 and 4, and to start the kind of holiday traditions she had always imagined that her family would have. Tough times call for yuletide magic.

This involved going to a tree farm, way off in the country. "I was determined to hike

to the farthest corner of the farm to make it seem like a real adventure," she recalls. "I hadn't counted on the wind, or the chill that was present on that day."

Her kids, Cole and Ella, took turns plopping dejectedly into snowdrifts. There were whined protests and pleas to go home. The adventure almost turned into an ordeal. But after quite a few tears were shed – by all parties present, the perfect tree was found. And it only took a hot chocolate to turn those tears into memory.

"The tree was truly beautiful when we put it up and decorated it," says Kendal. "We have gone back to that tree farm every year since in search of the perfect tree, and we always find it. Last year we talked about the 'remember when we used to come here and you used to cry?' stories. Traditions, already! Exactly what I wanted."

Cutting your own tree is guaranteed to provide great memories. Many parents bring sleds to pull their kids along in – with blan-



kets to cover when the sun hides behind the clouds or the wind picks up. Others will bring thermoses with hot chocolate or cider.

Still others will gather up groups of friends in order to make the tree farm visit a social affair – kids are often a lot more patient when there are friends along to play with.

Be sure to bring your own saw, plus some rope for tying your tree down. Not all tree farms will provide these.

All the trimmings

Deborah has a special love of ornaments – and of decorating.

"I have collected one ornament a year since I was a teenager and so have a box of real treasures to bring out every year," she explains. Her collection began when a friend's family gave her a set of antique ornaments. "Since then, I've looked for special ornaments whenever I travel," says Deborah.

"I've also got some with very special memories attached – like the poodle ornament I got when the family dog died, and Pooh and Tigger ornaments from when my husband and I were first dating," says Deborah. "Totally sappy, I know, but those were our nicknames for each other. We still smile today whenever they come out of the box."

Deborah's daughter, who is still a toddler, has already started her own collection, with the help of mom. Every year, on Christmas Eve, Deborah gives her daughter an ornament as a special gift. "One day she can have her

own tree and she can remember all of the fun we had together.”

Jamie, a mother of two, is looking forward to her favourite moment in the holiday season – unwrapping the same garland of popcorn that her family has used for years.

“I don’t really remember when we originally strung up that popcorn,” she admits.

“What I do know is that it looks the same now as it did all those years ago. I just don’t think it would be our Christmas tree without that string of popcorn.”

Young families might want to consider shopping for ornaments and old-style trimmings at either farmers’ markets or antique stores. The old time feel of these ornaments contain their own sense of nostalgia – plus the fun of these shopping trips will provide their own memories.

For a crafty bit of fun, you can work with your kids in creating their own ornaments (*see sidebar*). And ask extended family members to offer ornaments as gifts for the kids. In a few years, your tree will be full of memories.

Rocking ‘round the tree

Christmas carols are a warm, fuzzy part of the holidays, and are especially fun to sing together when your family is busily trimming the tree.

Every year, dad John pulls out a book of Christmas carols he’s had since he studied



piano at age 12, and leads his family of four in those familiar tunes as they put up tree lights, wrap garlands and hang ornaments.

“We’ve been doing this since the kids were babies,” says John, “and they are now in there ‘twens and early teens. And guess what? They still love it. Although they might not tell their friends that!”

Frances, a mom of three, grew up listening to a mix of great Christmas music. “My parents loved Bing Crosby’s Christmas, and we kids were totally into Snoopy’s Christmas.” These days, she says she “has a blast introducing my kids to the songs that I loved when I was little.”



Photo: Gerri Weatherbee

Music is also a big part of tree trimming for Desiree and her young daughter, Gretchen. “Each year, I get her a new pair of Christmas pyjamas, and we turn up the music to decorate. We go for the old school classics, lots of jazz,” she says.

Each year, Desiree also takes a shot of Gretchen in her new pjs in front of the tree. “I’ll have tree trimming memories of her that will last forever,” she says.

Even elves get snacky

Trimming the tree calls for some great nibbles and drinks.

Christmas cookies, snack mix and candy canes are sure winners. Or double the fun by having foods with a dual purpose – you can eat them and hang them as decorations. Like gingerbread men or popcorn balls.

As for drinks, Deborah is an innovator. “We always have eggnog lattes,” she smiles. “Whip some heated eggnog into a frothy foam and pour in a shot of good coffee. For the kids, you can add hot chocolate instead. Sweet, delicious, and only to be found once a year. It tastes like Christmas!”

Whatever tree trimming traditions you have, enjoy them. They will be the memories that your kids will one day pass on to their own children.

Donald Fraser is a freelance writer and seasonal pine tree hunter.

Christmas Wreath Ornament



These delightful ornaments are simple and fun to make – even young kids will love arranging and painting the wood cutouts, tying the bows and adding embellishments.

They’re guaranteed to brighten up your tree and your hearts.

Materials (for one wreath)

- one 3” wooden embroidery hoop
- 20 wooden circles (wood cutouts) – 12 – 3/4” and 8 – 3/8”
- craft paint, red, white, green, or other colours
- small paintbrushes
- finishing gloss
- 8” length of ribbon or fabric bow
- glue gun (for use by adults)
- white glue (for embellishments)

- newspaper to cover work area
- small embellishments – small silver or gold balls, metallic stars, stick-on rhinestones, glitter

Directions

Step 1: Cover work surface with newspaper.

Step 2: Paint the wooden circles in Christmas colours or other favourite colours. Allow to dry.

Step 3: Apply a second coat of paint to each circle. Allow to dry.

Step 4: Paint the wooden hoop (optional).

Step 5: Add patterns to your circles, such as dots, or stripes (optional). To make dots, dip the handle end of the paintbrush into the paint and dab it on the surface of the wooden circle. Allow to dry.

Step 6: Position the large circles on the hoop, spacing out evenly. Leave a small space at top or bottom for bow. Use the glue gun to glue circles to the hoop: lift one circle, add glue to the hoop in that area and place circle on top. Continue with the remaining circles. Now add more glue to the back of each circle and hoop to give it a stronger bond.

Step 7: Position the small circles on top of the large ones. Your hoop should be entirely covered up, except for the spot for your bow. Glue the small circles onto the wreath.

Step 8: Paint the wreath with your finishing gloss and allow to dry.

Step 9: Add any embellishments using the white glue.

Step 10: Add bow or use ribbon to make a bow. Glue in place using the glue gun.

Pinecone Elf

Instructions for making this cute little guy can be found on our website.



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