

Have you put up your tree, yet? This year I've noticed trees going up in homes after Halloween. Before Thanksgiving some towns have decorated for the Christmas holidays and have hosted open houses in their local businesses. Christmas season is more than just the days leading up to December 25th; it's now the months before and after.

Extended families and families who must travel during the holidays have prompted a longer celebration season. For family members who celebrate early, why not take the whole family to a Christmas tree farm to select the perfect tree?

Tree selection was always a memorable time when I was growing up. My Dad and I were the tree selectors, while my other siblings stayed by the fire and helped Mom retrieve the decorations from the attic. Since, we did not have a tree farm to make our selection from; we scoured our country side for the perfect cedar. We never found one that was beautifully shaped on all sides, so we usually settled for one whose bare side could be placed against the wall out of sight. Does that bring back memories for you too?

The selection process on a tree farm is very similar. You can bring the entire family to share in the hunt. Your family will have a choice between tree varieties and sizes. They can walk through rows and rows of trees smelling their fragrance before making a selection. Once you decide, tag your tree. Some farms will net the tree and put a stand on it, so that when you arrive home, it's ready for decorations.

While at the tree farm, take the opportunity to enjoy some of the farm related activities too. Many of our farms today, offer petting zoos, duck races and wagon rides. Make the day a fun-filled day for the family and create your own special memories. Take advantage of photo opportunities too. Some tree farms hire a photographer on the busy days to snap that photo for you.

When comparing purchasing live versus artificial trees, keep in mind that an artificial tree's selection is a short trip to the attic with no family time associated with selection other than the time it was purchased. While, a fresh Christmas tree brings a wonderful smell and life into your home with the memory of its selection and possible fun stories associated with your choice of tree.

To find a tree farm, visit the Southern Christmas Tree Association's (SCTA) website. SCTA is an organization of Christmas tree growers in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi who work together to provide excellent trees for your Christmas season. Their website contains lots of helpful information too. Log onto to: <http://www.southernchristmastrees.org/> for more information. Another helpful site is Pick Your Own Christmas Tree at: <http://pickyourownchristmastree.org/LAxmastrees.php> It provides a map of Louisiana with tree farm locations.

When Christmas is over, allow the Christmas tree to become part of an environmental lesson. Did you know that one acre of Christmas trees provides oxygen for 18 people? The trees can be re-cycled back into the landscape. Once holiday decorations are removed, place the tree in a pond for a fish shelter or place the tree on a sloped hillside to prevent soil erosion.