

Christmas Trees and Decorations

can bring allergies and Asthma along with good cheer



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Merry Christmas and please pass the antihistamine or inhaler — 'tis the season for asthma and allergies. Like Aunt Helen's twice re-gifted fruit cake, sneezing and congestion are simply not welcome guests at the annual family holiday celebration.

Smack in the middle of Christmas debate is often the choice of a real or artificial Christmas trees, wreaths and other decorations. Which is better "real" or "artificial" is one of those questions that the answer is a resounding: "that depends, but let me explain." The bottom line is that you want the "beauty of Christmas" and not the allergens to take your breath away.

If you want a quick clue as to how complicated the issue is, you need to know more about the first artificial tree. In the 1930's, the Addis Brush Company created the first artificial-brush trees using the same machinery as they used to make toilet brushes. The Addis 'Silver Pine' tree was actually patented in 1950. Now, does a toilet brush go into the healthy or unhealthy category?

Why Allergies and Asthma Spike During Holidays

Stored holiday items can be a source of mold growth. Fiberglass and other insulation particles, dust and mold from storage areas and other allergens can get into improperly stored holiday heirlooms. Even tightly sealed boxes can attract mice and insects, each contributing to the allergen and germ categories.

There has been an increase in the number of people affected with asthma and allergies spiking during the holidays. Obviously, Christmas comes at a time of year when homes are most likely to be closed up to protect from winter weather. Many homes are built with wet crawl spaces and improper venting systems. With tighter construction, attic and basement storage areas are often full of mold.

Fortunately, the suffering from Christmas allergies can be avoided with a few tips on proper selection, storage and care of holiday trees and decorations whether they are artificial or real.

STORAGE AND ALLERGEN PREVENTION TIPS

- Start off by selecting moisture and dirt free areas for your holiday decoration storage.
- Clean stored items with a damp cloth before storage. Dirt supports the growth of mold.
- Store trees, decorations and other materials in plastic bins, or wrap in plastic bags, not cardboard. Cardboard holds moisture and is a food source for mold.

- Control humidity in storage areas. Dehumidify basement storage areas and install fans controlled with humidistat in attics.

- If the stored items from last year are already covered with mold and dust, place them in plastic bags or bins before carrying them through the house. Dragging mold and other allergens through the house can spread mold and allergens.

- Once out of storage, take the contaminated items outside of the home or into a garage to unpack them.

- Fresh cut trees or stored items can have dust blown off them using a leaf blower or they be can be hosed down with a garden hose. If you use a leaf blower, wear a mask. Both methods remove mold, dust, and some of the lead dust usually found on artificial trees and decorations.

- Discard contaminated packing and bring the cleaned items into the home.

- If your holiday items were covered with mold and dust, change the conditions in the storage area. Mold growing in the storage areas will affect the air quality in the main home all year around.

- Do not spray materials with pesticide no matter how grossed out you are by the bugs. The poisons designed to kill bugs will damage people's health. Plain soap and water will safely and effectively remove insect and rodent contamination.

The Live Versus Artificial Christmas Tree Debate

In this corner, we have live Christmas trees and decorations. Live Christmas trees are a crop. The National Christmas Tree Association states that the



CHRISTMAS BONUS HEALTHY INDOOR AIR TIPS

- Given a choice, it is better to place trees and decorations in areas of hard surface floors such as wood as opposed to carpet. These floors are easier to clean and hold fewer allergens.

- The use of a quality air cleaner such as a HEPA filter can provide immediate indoor air improvement by removing the circulating allergens.

- We want our homes to smell like Christmas. Many of those "plug in" scents contain synthetic esters and formaldehyde. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology states that "we know that asthmatics are clearly sensitive to odors and fumes; therefore it would not be unexpected that air fresheners could trigger asthmatic episodes." Bake a pie or use potpourri as an alternative to the artificial scents.

average Christmas tree is 7 years old when harvested. That would mean that the tree was producing oxygen to improve the environment for 7 years. Those trees require care, thereby creating American jobs.

One disadvantage of live Christmas trees is that they require replacement every year. That cost may be greater than the cost of an artificial tree across its lifetime. There is also the issue that Christmas trees need properly disposed of each year. The good news is that they can be turned into mulch.

In the other corner are artificial Christmas trees and decorations.

Artificial trees are light to carry and easy to assemble. It is the only option for people who can't handle the work of a live tree.

According to the US Commerce Department, 80 percent of artificial trees are manufactured and shipped from China. That would be Chinese jobs created.

Artificial Christmas trees, tree lights and plastic decorations have been subject to warnings about lead. Lead is added to PVC during manufacture to make the plastic more pliable when hanging strings of light or adjusting tree limbs. That lead is a soft material will easily fall from the products containing it when they are handled. Lead is a serious health hazard, particularly to children.

The process of manufacturing the PVC creates the toxic chemical dioxin, which is also released if the plastic is burned during disposal.

If you are curious as which side of the tree discussion the Howard household falls, we have a 10' artificial tree and a 12' real Christmas tree. No matter which type of tree and decorations you select, have a happy, allergy and asthma free holiday.

For links to additional information about Christmas healthy tips, go to: www.envirospect.info/ChristmasDecorationsAllergies

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