

## Christmas Trees

What could be more delightful at Christmastime than to walk into a house, breathe in that wonderful odor of fresh fir, and see the decorated tree glimmering in a corner of the living room? The tradition of decorating Christmas trees started in Germany some 200 years ago and quickly spread across the world. And why not? The splendiferous fir gives beauty and comfort as it hides gifts big and small nestled under its branches.

In the past, getting a Christmas tree was an expedition. People set out for the woods in groups, either by sleigh or on foot. Once there, they selected a straight tree, rounded but not too tall, cut it down, and then headed back home with their prize. The ornaments used to decorate it were balls, garlands, and candles.

Christmas tree production and sales have, in recent years, become big business. Canada is the world's leading producer of Christmas trees. Each year, we harvest more than 12 million trees.

The most common species used as Christmas trees are:

- the [balsam fir \(/photo-album\)](#);
- the Fraser fir;
- the Scotch pine;
- the Douglas fir.

Other species, such as the [spruce](#), cannot be used because their needles begin to fall as soon as the tree is cut down.

Quebec and the Maritime Provinces produce mainly the [balsam fir](#), which is very [aromatic](#). Thousands of [hectares](#) of land are committed to its cultivation. It takes ten to thirteen years to grow a tree to the ideal height. The branches of the trees are trimmed each year to enhance their shape and ensure that the tree fills out. Trees cut in the forest are known as wildings.

Western Canada and the United States produce mainly the Douglas fir. Although it grows fast, the Douglas is not very hardy.

The Fraser fir is cultivated extensively in the United States. Its main advantage is that its



needles stay on the tree for a very long time.

The Scotch pine, produced both in Canada and the United States, is also used as a Christmas tree.

