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## 11 best real Christmas trees that smell great and don't drop needles

Not happy with a fake? These are the trees you should buy instead

There's nothing quite like the smell of a real Christmas tree to get you excited about the festive season – no wonder so many scented candles and room sprays try to emulate the smell.

Real trees look a picture too and can even be good for the environment – for every tree cut down at Christmas time, at least another two are planted.

Nordman Firs are the most popular in the UK, making up for 80 per cent of sales of real Christmas trees.

But don't be too quick to rule out options such as Fraser Firs and Korean Firs, both fashionable in other countries and increasingly making their mark over here.

The Norway Spruce, common a few decades ago, is making a comeback too.

You could also consider a potted version for a hassle-free option that you can replant in the new year, and reuse year after year.

We tested real Christmas trees for shape, needle retention, colour, gloss, value for money and longevity – as well as how easy they were to get in the stand.

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Pines and Needles Nordman fir: From £39.95, Pines and Needles

These trees – which are available from 3ft up to an outlandishly tall 12ft tall – retain their glossy needles, deep green colouring and picture-perfect shape right up until the end of the festive season even in homes with the central heating whacked up (although it's obviously best to keep them away from the radiator). For the ultimate in decadence, we tried its decorating service, which has become quite a hit among the time-poor. Our cheery decorators turned up in Santa hats and had the whole job done in around an hour – and the end result looked like something out of a magazine.

Buy now

John Lewis & Partners Korean fir: From £75, John Lewis & Partners

The Korean fir is fuller and more dense than other Christmas trees, with short soft needles that have a lovely silvery underside. Slimmer than the Nordmans, they also have a characteristic zesty aroma. It gets its name because it's native to the high mountains of South Korea, which can grow up to around 30ft tall but for those who prefer a more meagre height, we'd recommend this trusty department store whose trees are available in three sizes (5-6ft, 6-7ft and 7-8ft) and have grown for a minimum of 10 years.

Buy now

Ikea abies Nordmanniana: £29 (includes a £20 Ikea voucher), Ikea

Back for the eighth year, this tree – which stands around 5ft tall – is astonishing value (great for you) and part of a very clever piece of marketing (great for them). Although the price tag says £29 – already cheap – you get a £20 Ikea voucher when you buy it, essentially meaning it will cost you less than £10. Grown in Scotland, it's both fragrant and long-lasting. But be warned the voucher has to be spent between 13 January and 23 February in a single transaction in store only.

Available in-store

Bloom & Wild starry night Christmas tree: £33, Bloom & Wild

This letterbox flowers company is doing three mini table-top Christmas trees this year, of which this is the cheapest. Standing at 40cm tall, it comes with traditional round gold baubles of varying shades, a garland of glittery gold stars and some warm LED lights. Incredibly, it



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all fits in a letter-box friendly box, complete with soil, gold pot and helpful care tips ready for you to assemble and decorate it. The whole process takes a matter of minutes (unless your garland tangles up, as ours did) and makes for a lovely festive centrepiece on your dining table or sideboard.

Buy now

Send Me A Christmas Tree Fraser fir: From £39.95, Send Me A Christmas Tree

The Fraser fir – one of the most popular trees in the USA and Canada – has a similar shape to the Norway Spruce but with a more intense and long-lasting citrusy smell. Perhaps even more importantly, the needle retention is superior so you can get your tree as early as you like. We also noticed the needles aren't as sharp on this tree as others we tested, making it a great option for families with young children. And it's super sturdy too – good for heavier ornaments or a Christmas garland. Available from 4ft to 10 ft.

Buy now

Deliver Me A Christmas Tree Norway spruce: From £35.95, Deliver Me A Christmas Tree

This company has some cracking Nordman firs this year, but we were even more taken with its Kent grown Norway spruce trees which give a traditional, old-school look. While needle retention hasn't typically been in the Norway Spruce's favour, this one should do you proud as long as you regularly water and care for it. In fact, they're installing two in Westminster Cathedral this year. Aesthetically, we like the dark green hue and pointed tips and the wide bottomed-shape. Available from 6ft to 12ft and larger on request.

Buy now

Waitrose & Partners potted Christmas tree: £60, Waitrose & Partners

We were really taken with these Norway Spruce trees which give a traditional look with no fear of needle drop due to being potted. Simply plant it in the garden after this year's festivities and you should be able to use it for many Christmases to come. Ours was 3ft 2", but they range between 3-4ft – a great size for smaller homes. The red pot gives a festive finish – we popped a tartan ribbon round ours. It's pricey, but much glossier and fuller than other potted Nordmans we tried.

Buy now

B&Q Nordmann fir: From £22, B&Q

Our tree had pretty much the perfect A shape and was completely symmetrical, with no bare bits or unsightly needles towards the bottom. It was a treat to decorate too because there were so many neat spaces between the branches for the baubles to glisten. Grown in Scotland, we felt they stand out for their glossy sheen too but it wasn't as full as some of the more expensive trees we tested. Available in four different sizes, ranging from just under 4ft to nearly 9ft, they arrive in the store within a day of being cut.

Buy now

Homebase living potted Norway Spruce: From £20, Homebase

Another potted tree that's great for replanting after the festive season's finished, this one is a Norway Spruce, which would usually be in danger of shedding needles but is saved that fate by the fact that it's still complete with roots. A low maintenance option, on account of not having to bother with a stand, ours had a neat shape with deep green sharp needles. Available in 60-80cm or 80-100cm, it's easy to transport and wallet-friendly.

Buy now

John Lewis & Partners Fraser fir: From £75, Premium Christmas Trees

Another stunning Fraser fir, this one is dense, shiny and full right to the top. Ours arrived exceptionally well packaged and protected and was surprisingly lightweight – handy for transporting (although these guys deliver to the door so that probably won't be an issue) and fitting it into the stand. We liked the conical shape and the long-lasting balsam scent and we're giving it bonus points because there was much less vacuuming needed than with other trees due to the needle retention. Available in four sizes from 5ft up to 9ft.

Buy now



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Homebase Nordman fir premium cut Christmas tree 9ft: £110, Homebase

You'll need high ceilings for this one as it stands at a mammoth 9ft high. But it's a real stunner if you've got the room. We couldn't fault the shape and rich green colour and it comes with an adjustable tree stand so you're all set to go from the moment you get home. The needles on our tree looked silky, almost polished and practically shone when the lights were up. But you'll need a lot of decorations and you'll need to keep watering it.

Buy now

The verdict: Real Christmas trees

The Pines and Needles Nordman fir is hard to fault, with striking proportions and exceptional needle retention. For something a bit different, we love the John Lewis & Partners Korean fir . And if affordability is your main priority, go for Ikea's Nordman fir – fantastic value for money, especially if you're an Ikea regular.

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