



LAGUNA ROOTS: A message from the City Arborist

I am often asked about using an artificial holiday tree, rather than a real tree that was cut to be used in festivities, as a way to be more environmentally conscious. Having a real tree in your home for the holidays can actually help the environment, as well as reduce your carbon footprint compared to purchasing an artificial tree. Real trees are grown on large tracts of land that preserve green space, connect fragmented natural areas, reduce atmospheric carbon as they grow, and provide wildlife, bird, and insect habitat. Holiday tree farms use regenerative forestation practices that see only 30 million trees are cut out of the over 300 million trees that are actively growing. [Recycling a holiday tree in Laguna Beach](#) is very easy, further reducing your holiday carbon footprint.



The two most popular species of trees used for decorations are Fir (*Abies*) and Spruce (*Picea*) trees. Firs have shorter branches with an upturned tip, with needles that grow in a spiral up to the ends of each branch. This gives fir trees a fuller appearance. Spruce trees can come in unique colors such as silver and blue hues. The branches are longer, with more space in between, accentuating ornaments. Interestingly, the popular Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) isn't a fir at all! It has pendulous cones, whereas true firs have cones that grow upright on the branches. It's genus name *Pseudotsuga* means 'false hemlock' which stems from the confusion of 19th century botanists. Douglas Fir has at times been labelled a pine, spruce, fir, hemlock, and sequoia!

The woody scent that many associate with the holiday season comes from a chemical called pinene (pi-nene). It is released heavily when your tree is cut, but also regularly from the needles and stems. In nature, it protects the trees from insects by disrupting communication signals, and acts as an anti-fungal agent. To keep this aroma lingering in your home and the needles on the tree, lower the temperature in the room, keep the tree away from vents, make a fresh cut before securing into your tree in the stand, and provide one quart of water per inch of trunk diameter, each day. This means about 1 gallon of water should be enough for most trees. Don't add sugar, aspirin, bleach, or floral preservatives to the water; plain tap water is all the tree needs!



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Through *LAGUNA ROOTS*, I will bring you periodic updates on Laguna Beach's urban forest. Until then, feel free to contact me directly, or use [Ask Laguna!](#) to submit a request for many City services, including any of your tree related inquiries!