

## Green guests

### • Live trees visit for the holidays, then go back where they belong

By Rebecca Ragain for Pamplin Media Group

Pamplin Media Group, Nov 13, 2007



L.E. BASKOW / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP

Zac Perry and Caroline Petrich with dog Dakota check out the growth of a Douglas fir at Reed College. As an alumnus of the Original Living Christmas Tree Co., the fir once spent the holidays indoors before being replanted.



As a letter carrier going about her daily route, Diane Wack gets a good look at the Christmas trees that people toss in their front yards after the holiday season has passed.

“It’s really an eyesore,” she says.

So when Wack learned that she could rent a living conifer for Christmas, and that it would be planted in a green space after the holidays, she thought it was a wonderful idea.

That was more than 10 years ago. Wack now is one of the most long-term of the customers of the Original Living Christmas Tree Co., or TOLCTC for short. Wack’s 13-year-old daughter barely remembers a Christmas when the family didn’t have a living tree.

This year marks the 16th season that the company will rent living Christmas trees – with their burlap-wrapped root balls tucked into nursery pots – to Portland residents.

As far as the TOLCTC founder knows, this tree rental business is unique to Portland, with the exception of a two-year-old program run by the San Francisco Department of the Environment, which was inspired by TOLCTC.

Renting a tree is easy. That's part of the appeal. For \$75 (\$65 if you ordered before Halloween), close-in customers can have a tree delivered to their door by Dec. 14. Trees range in size from 5 1/2 to 7 1/2 tall.

Customers can choose from Douglas fir, Fraser fir, Nordman fir, balsam fir, Serbian spruce and Scotch pine, which are selected from local nurseries.

This year, the company also will offer some trees for customers to pick up on one day only, Dec. 11. The trees for pickup are 5 1/2 to 6 feet tall, including the pot and cost \$65, with a separate \$20 deposit check required.

A living tree has a unique silhouette: somewhere between the untamed shape of a wild forest tree and the typical precut Christmas tree, which is heavily pruned for that perfect cone shape.

"They're nice trees. They're characters," says Caroline Petrich, who has been renting living trees for about 13 years. "People who come to our house for the holidays look forward to seeing what the trees are going to look like."

Rental customers agree to care for the rental tree during the 18 days it is in their home. The tree's needs are simple: Sufficient water, and not too much direct heat, are the main considerations.

A living Christmas tree serves much the same function as a cut tree, bringing the smell and sight of nature indoors. It can be trimmed just as elaborately – as long as care is taken not to overheat the tree and not to add anything that can't be removed at the end.

But TOLCTC tree rental customers feel that bringing a live tree into their homes adds something to their holiday that plastic or cut trees don't.

"It's just nice to have an actual, living tree in your midst," Wack says.

Petrich agrees: "Every time the tree is delivered, I feel like I'm welcoming the first guest for the holiday. It has a presence."

Tree rental customers also like the fact that their Christmas tree will be picked up after the holidays so they don't have to worry about disposal.

So far, more than 2,000 trees have gone into the ground – instead of the yard-waste bin or the trash – through the work of TOLCTC.

Lining up planters for the trees is the first task each year. The number of planters determines how many trees available to rent, from 30 trees the first year to more than 400 trees in recent years.

### **Private planters move faster**

TOLCTC sells the trees for half the price paid for to anyone who will plant them: private property owners, government agencies, landscapers and community groups such as conservation organizations, schools and churches.

The original plan – hatched while recycling cut trees– was to have nonprofit groups and public agencies plant trees that the public subsidized through their rental fees.

That plan has worked to some degree, especially during the first seven years, when public groups planted nearly all the rental trees. Agencies that have purchased low-cost trees include Metro, the city of Portland, the city of Troutdale, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

It takes a lot more time to sell trees to nonprofit groups and public agencies than it does to landscapers or private property owners.

TOLCTCs long-term goal is to have public-interest groups coming back to buy trees year after year. TOLCTC wants to be accepted by the public planting community. Community members are encouraged to help spread the word by calling local parks departments or neighborhood schools to let them know that low-priced trees are available.

### **Canyon forest grows**

One green space that recently has benefited from TOLCTC trees is Reed College's 26-acre forest, located at the headwaters of Crystal Springs Creek in Southeast Portland.

For the past eight years, restoration specialist Zac Perry has been responsible for reintroducing native plant species to Reed College Canyon. When he learned about the company several years ago, Perry immediately was sold on the idea.

He says that participating in the program as a planter allows him to help "minimize the consumption or impact of the holiday season and find a good home for Doug fir trees."

Once planted, these evergreens offer shelter for birds and bats during winter storms in a way that deciduous trees don't. Douglas firs, Perry says, also are good seed sources for squirrels.

Although Perry appreciates that TOLCTC's prices allow him to purchase larger trees for less than he would pay at a nursery, price was a secondary factor.

Mostly, Perry wanted to support the partnership that the firm has created between tree renters and green-space managers such as himself.

"It really takes all three groups being dedicated to the concept," Perry says.

Longtime rental customer Petrich feels similarly: "I really admire TOLCTC and what they have done so far. They are blazing a new trail. ... It's an example of a small effort that helps make Portland a great place to live."

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### **Caring for a living Christmas tree**

Let your tree acclimate to warmer temperatures by leaving it outside, near the wall of your house, for a day or two before bringing it indoors.

Don't put tinsel, fake snow or big, hot lights on the tree. Smaller, cooler-burning lights are fine.

Keep the tree away from heaters and stoves, if possible. A cool spot near a window is ideal.

Don't forget to water the tree.

To rent a tree, fill out an order form at [www.livingchristmastrees.org](http://www.livingchristmastrees.org), or call 503-501-0087

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Friday, December 16, 2005 (AP)  
San Francisco Renting Christmas Trees  
By DAN GOODIN, Associated Press Writer

(12-16) 02:25 PST San Francisco (AP) --

It might just take a Christmas miracle to deck out these spindly branches, and at \$90 a tree they're anything but cheap. But like Charlie Brown's sad sapling, it's the thought behind them that shines through.

The city is renting 100 young potted trees, from fruitless olives to Brisbane boxes, to homes for the holidays. Instead letting them get tossed to the curb when holidays are over, the city will pick them up in January and plant them in a neighborhood in need of greenery.

"We call it the guilt-free option," said Mark Westlund, spokesman for the San Francisco Department of the Environment, which introduced the unusual tree rental program this year as an environmentally friendly alternative to harvested firs and artificial trees.

"You don't have to worry about cutting down a living tree and you don't have to worry about buying a tree with petroleum materials," he said.

The trees, typically 6- to 12-feet high, are far from the full-bodied evergreens most Christmas revelers are accustomed to.

But that's fine with Stacy Collins Johnson, who rented a live primrose to help her children, ages 4 and 6, learn the importance of giving back to the environment.

"I wasn't really sure how this would play out, having a nontraditional Christmas tree in our house," said Johnson, 43. "I thought they'd be upset, and they love it. They named the tree Charlie Green."

Environmentalists say growing real trees to chop down for a few weeks of pleasure is a waste of valuable resources, and discarding them often clogs local landfills. Artificial trees often contain lead and other harmful chemicals that eventually end up in landfills, too.

San Francisco launched the live rental program this year with the nonprofit group Friends of the Urban Forest, which plants trees along the city's streets.

Within a week of the announcement, all 100 trees were claimed, Westlund said.

"I'm kind of an unrepentant tree hugger," said George Slack, who rented three trees for his cabinet shop. "There's something very nice about having a living piece of greenery in your living environment this time of year."

The city's inspiration for the program was John Fogel, whose Original Living Christmas Tree Company in Portland, Ore., has been renting live Christmas trees and later replanting them for 14 years. His customers aren't all "granola-eating, sandal-wearing type people," Fogel said.

"It's a practical thing they do around the holidays," he said. -----  
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# TIME

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## BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY

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Monday, Dec. 11, 2006

### How to Have a Green Christmas

It may be the most wonderful time of the year, but it's also the most wasteful. Here's how you can be kind to the environment and still celebrate in style.

By MARYANNE MURRAY BUECHNER

### TREES

Buy a potted or balled Christmas tree (roots still attached) so you can replant it in the backyard or donate it to the parks department. [LivingChristmasTrees.org](http://LivingChristmasTrees.org) has lots of advice for do-it-yourselfers; it also "rents" living trees to residents of Portland, Ore., for \$75 each. Friends of the Urban Forest of San Francisco ([Fuf.net](http://Fuf.net)) rents nontraditional trees, such as Southern Magnolia and Strawberry, for \$150, and replants them on city streets. Prefer a regular cut tree? Choose a real one that's grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers—ask local merchants if they have an organic farm supplier—or order from [Freshchristmastree.com](http://Freshchristmastree.com), a grower that ships to 46 states and uses sustainable methods. Then recycle: many municipalities collect trees to mulch. Search [Earth911.org](http://Earth911.org) to find programs in your area.

KXL

12/08/03

Not too late to get your living Christmas tree

You can rent a living Christmas tree without having to buy a pot or learn how to care for it.

Are you tired of trudging through the rain and the mud to cut down a Christmas tree? You should consider renting one this holiday season.

That's right, you can rent a living Christmas tree without having to buy a pot or learn how to care for it. John Fogel, who founded the Original Living Christmas Tree company, said it's easy to do.

"Most of our customers say it's a convenient way to celebrate with a tree. You order it through the mail and it shows up at your house."

For 12 years, Fogel's been renting living Christmas trees. For \$55, which includes a refundable deposit, he'll deliver the tree and pick it up after 17 days. Then, he'll plant it.

"We provide care instructions so they grow old and improve the environment."

So far, Fogel said he's planted more than 1,500 trees. He got the idea while chipping Christmas trees into mulch.

For more information, call 503-813-TREE.

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OPB 12/6 450pm, 12/7 am

One Man's Mission to Promote Live Christmas Trees PORTLAND, OR (2004-12-06) In a state where Christmas trees are the fifth biggest cash crop, colder weather signals the hot season. Oregon leads the nation in Christmas tree production and the vast majority of those are exported. But one Portland man has based his living for the last 13 years on more local demand.

OPB News

One Man's Mission to Promote Live Christmas Trees

By Allison Frost

PORTLAND, OR 2004-12-06 (Oregon Considered) - In a state where Christmas trees are the fifth biggest cash crop, colder weather signals the hot season. Oregon leads the nation in Christmas tree production and the vast majority of those are exported.

But one Portland man has based his living for the last 13 years on more local demand. John Fogel runs the Original Living Christmas Tree company, which rents live trees to holiday revelers in the Portland area.

Fogel starts this work day like many others, talking with his housemates. It's clear he's not your typical businessman. He says there's no other company quite like his. He's not referring to the fact that he runs his business out of his bedroom (which he does).

He's talking about the unique service he offers both delivering AND picking up live trees at Christmastime. It's not a full time gig, but it's been his only regular one for years.

John Fogel: This takes up about three months of my year, so it's a job hunt every January 1st for me.

Fogel moved to Portland in 1989 and started his business in 1992.

John Fogel: I was in an environmental group and we were chipping up Christmas trees [for a fundraiser] and so I just had the idea, so what about replanting them, it seems like the next best thing. And then we tried it and the trees lived, and then we tried delivery the next year, which is key

It's key because his business is based on making it convenient for people to rent trees, instead of buying them outright. The price for this service is competitive with the cost of buying a cut tree tree rental costs range from 55 to 70 dollars.

Fogel has to arrange for trees to be re-planted after Christmas before he can determine how many he can offer Portland homes and businesses.

Not everyone wants a forest in their back yard because of Christmas every year. So the idea is to have the parks departments, conservation groups, landscapers, churches, school, plant the trees for them in areas other than the folks' back yard.

On this crisp December morning, Fogel has let me tag along on his first residential delivery. He and a helper roll a potted 7 foot tall Douglas fir up the dozen concrete steps of the Hawthorne area home of Pat DeGarmo.

John Fogel (to child) : Hi, how are you today? Are you a princess? Yes. Isn't that cute.

The princess, 4- year-old Lola, stands next to her grandmother Pat, as they inspect the tree.

Pat DeGarmo: It's beautiful

Allison Frost (to Lola): What do you think of it?

Lola (shyly): Dood.

Frost: Good?

Lola: I think it's pretty too.

Allison Frost: Will she help decorate the tree?

Pat DeGarmo: Yes, in fact Lola's going to be making some ornaments for it, maybe even later today.

Since DeGarmo is a repeat customer, she doesn't really need the detailed instruction sheet that accompanies the tree, though she solemnly promises to read it as soon as she finds her glasses

Pat DeGarmo: This is our third year, and I think it's the best way to have a tree. You know, I hate killing trees, and so it's really nice to have one and know it's going to continue to live. We frankly didn't do Christmas trees, we have a couple of indoor plants that we lighted, and put decorations on, and I think it had been several years since we had a cut tree.

Fogel says he usually has all of his reservations by early December, from between 300 and 400 customers.

Not everybody is at home when he arrives with a tree on his biggest delivery days, December 15th and 16th. More often than not people find their tree on their doorstep when they get home from work.

John Fogel: We put em right up against the house so the tree gets a little warmth from the house, a little cold from the outside, it's called "acclimating." It's good for the tree.

Fogel says he can sometimes deliver earlier, as he did for the DeGarmos.

Pat DeGarmo: You know the other nice thing too, is that with proper hydration and everything you know, it really stays so crisp the entire time. It really looks pretty.

A few other Portland businesses including two health food stores and a jewelry store are already enjoying their live trees.

Original Living Christmas Tree Company ([Link](#))

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By Rukmini Callimachi

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) \_ For years, Pat de Garmo's Christmas tree was her aging yucca plant.

¶ She doesn't like the idea of killing trees, and the size of her yard prevents her from getting a potted one. So year after year she strung lights and ornaments on the indoor yucca plant, hanging toy drums and colored orbs from its stiff branches.

¶ For environmentally conscious consumers like de Garmo \_ and their numbers abound in this liberal Northwest city \_ a venture that rents out living Christmas trees is filling a void.

¶ The Original Living Christmas Tree Company founded by John Fogel, 39, has rented out 419 Christmas trees this holiday season, starting at \$55 for a 7-foot Douglas fir.

¶ The trees are taken out of the ground, roots and all, put into pots,

and delivered to families in the Portland area. Soon after New Year's, Fogel and his crew pick up the trees and deliver them to parks, school districts and other groups who pay around \$10 to have the trees planted on their property.

¶ "It seems like to cut a tree and put it in your house and have it dry out and then just toss it away is such a shame. This way, I know it will be replanted \_ no guilt," said the 61-year-old de Garmo, a retired nurse, who hasn't decorated her indoor plants since she discovered the rent-a-tree business three years ago.

¶ Officials at the National Christmas Tree Association say they know of no other rent-a-tree business venture in the United States.

¶ While Fogel says he could grow beyond his current orders, he maintains a strict policy of accepting no more orders than he can find buyers willing to plant the trees come January.

¶ "Just the idea of cutting all of these trees \_ these living things for decorations \_ kind of appalls me," said 44-year-old Glen Jacobs, a high school theater teacher in Portland, who along with his family has turned renting a tree into a yearly tradition.

¶ While tree-rental businesses appear to be a rarity, buying live Christmas trees that have been placed in pots is less so.

¶ Steve Mannhard is a board member of the National Christmas Tree Association. About a decade ago customers began showing up with shovels at his sprawling Christmas tree farm on Alabama's Gulf Coast.

¶ "People started trying to dig the trees out of the ground. I asked them: 'Why are you doing that?' They said, 'Because I want it to live,'" said Mannhard, 57, who began offering potted trees in addition to cut ones at Fish River Trees, near Summerdale, Ala., in 1992.

¶ Last year, out of a total of nearly 5,000 trees he sold, about 1,000 were potted, said Mannhard \_ a fact he says underscores the popularity of the living tree concept.

¶ "Trees and human beings have a close relationship \_ and some people are more sensitive to that," he said.

¶ Fogel started the Original Living Christmas Tree Co. in 1992. He says the seed was planted by his father decades ago in upstate New York, when he read to him a fable about a lonely tree in the forest that longed to be decorated by a loving family.

¶ On a recent December afternoon, Fogel watched his two helpers lean a Douglas fir against a green house in a leafy Portland neighborhood. The owners were not home, so he left an envelope tucked among the tree's branches, outlining a few simple instructions on how to care for the tree \_ and the date when he planned to return.

¶ "My market happens to be people that feel guilty about cutting trees," Fogel said. "But this also happens to be a convenient alternative."

¶ And that is what makes his venture unique, said Bruce Judson, an expert on small businesses at the Yale School of Management, who points out that the \$791 million Christmas tree industry has been reeling from the growing popularity of synthetic trees.

¶ In 1990, 35.4 million households put up real trees and 36.3 million displayed artificial ones, according to a consumer survey by the National Christmas Tree Association. A decade later, the split was 32 million live and 50.6 million artificial.

¶ Those numbers show that Americans are increasingly choosing convenience over tradition, said Judson \_ and a venture like Fogel's neatly straddles both worlds.

¶ "This gives you the convenience of a plastic tree with the aesthetics and environmental values of a live tree," he said.

¶ While Fogel's trees have become a yearly tradition in hundreds of Portland homes, the endeavor has not yet made him rich. Someday, he hopes his business will support him year-round. But come January, he'll be out looking for a part-time job.

¶ "I've probably made 17 cents an hour over the last 15 years," Fogel said, "but at least I'm working for myself."

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24 DEC 2004  
CBC News Online Staff

PORTLAND, ORE. - U.S. environmentalists who love the trappings of Christmas but cringe at the thought of cutting down a tree now have another option – an Oregon company that rents out living evergreens and then replants them after the holidays.

The Original Living Christmas Tree Company has rented out more than 400 trees this Christmas season, starting at \$55 US for a two-metre Douglas fir.

The company's founder, John Fogel, and his crew take the plants out of the ground, roots and all, put them into pots and deliver them to people in the Portland area.

After New Year's Day, they return to pick up the trees, which they deliver to parks, schools and other groups that pay about \$10 to have them planted on their property.

"My market happens to be people that feel guilty about cutting trees," Fogel, who has offered the service since 1991, told the Associated Press news agency. "But this also happens to be a convenient alternative."

Staff at the National Christmas Tree Association say they don't know of any other rent-a-tree business in the United States.

Business experts said the \$791-million US Christmas tree industry should take note, because it has struggled as synthetic trees increase in popularity.

A survey by the Christmas tree association found that in 1990, about half the households with Christmas trees used artificial ones.

A decade later, about 61 per cent of households with trees – 50.6 million – turned to synthetic products.

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This one was a blogger Hanksblog@blogspot. Interestingly he is a flaming republican and put down Ithacans in two unrelated blogs a month or two later.

Friday, December 24, 2004  
Posted 8:36 AM by Hank  
GOTTA LOVE CAPITALISM

The Associated Press reports on a Portland, Oregon, man who rents live Christmas trees to people who don't want to have to kill a tree:

The Original Living Christmas Tree Company founded by John Fogel, 39, has rented out more than 400 Christmas trees this holiday season, starting at \$55 for a 7-foot Douglas fir.

The trees are taken out of the ground, roots and all, put into pots, and delivered to families in the Portland area. Soon after New Year's, Fogel and his crew pick up the trees and deliver them to parks, school districts and other groups who pay around \$10 to have the trees planted on their property.

A quick check on prices reveals that it doesn't cost much more in some instances to buy an artificial tree that someone could use year after year for the price of this one-shot tree.

Obviously, however, some people prefer the "real thing," especially one that is still alive, and Fogel is apparently filling the need.

Proving that, once again, the free market solves problems just fine.

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