



Decorating a Christmas Tree

1. Selecting a Tree

Remember your tree will have a visual impact and be the focal point of your room throughout the holiday season. The size of your tree will partially be determined by how much space you have in your room, but also keep in mind these factors to enhance showing off your ornament collection. The more branch tips on the tree, the more ornaments you can hang. If you want an informal look, choose a tree with long needles and upswept branches. For a formal appearance, select a tree with short needles and horizontal or down swept branches. If you are purchasing an artificial tree you should take storage into consideration and choose a tree that allows you to store it with the lights attached.

2. Lighting the Tree

A general rule of thumb is to use one strand of 40-50 lights per foot of tree. Of course, the simplest way is to purchase pre-lit tree that is hinged for easy storage. But if you are starting from scratch, remember the lights should be strung throughout the tree, not stretched over the tips of the branches. Tuck your lights around the trunk, weave them in and out of the length of the branches to give the tree depth. Keeping the amount of lights uniform throughout the tree is important.

3. Adding Garland

There are several ways to place garland on a tree. The most traditional is to swag garland, beginning on the bottom, at the back of the tree. Swag the garland from tip to tip, using 12" to 20" swags, depending on the width of the tree and then twist the garland on each tip. The swags should become smaller as you go up the tree. Other styles are to double swag the garland with one row falling lower than the other or to spiral the garland at an angle on the tree. There are also many types of garland to choose from, including traditional berry or gold leaf garland to elegant Vintage blown glass beads, crystal beads and many more.

4. Using Filler

Filling the spaces inside the tree creates an enchanting look from the inside out. This is the step that many household tree decorators don't know about. Filling inside space adds interest and compliments the overall mood of the tree. You can use ornaments, ribbon, garland, bows, fruit, toys, mirrors, small gifts, cards or pinecones, whatever fits your theme.



5. Creating a Themed Tree

To make a strong statement, it is important to choose a dominant subject or color for your tree. Most trees look best with a balance of texture, shape, size and color but this should be tied together with one element being dominant. For example, if your existing ornament collection has no theme, you can create one by introducing a significant quantity of one color or shape.

6. Design Theme

Repetition establishes design and can help create the theme of your tree. Using different shapes in the same color or repeating the same texture in different colors also works. Make choosing ornaments easy by categorizing your products into themes that can mix and match each other, such as the antique look of Christmas Past blending with the nostalgic toys of Santa and Friends. The key is to keep your theme in a basic motif – outdoors and nature, angelic and romantic, folk art and handcrafted, Western and Southwest, antique glass and heirlooms, nostalgic and family, etc.

7. Hanging Ornaments

First you must determine how many ornaments you will need for the size of your tree. It is not an exact science, but you can use a rough formula to achieve the look you might like for your display which is approximately 40 ornaments per foot of tree. For example if you are decorating a 7 foot tree you will need about 280 ornaments. Also, you will need to establish symmetry to your tree by hanging the largest quantity of ornaments first, then the next largest and so forth. Be sure ornaments are suspended and hang freely so they are not touching other branches. Shiny finishes should be hung before matte or soft finishes, and bright colors before muted colors. Each size, shape, texture and color should be distributed over the entire tree. Larger ornaments should be placed on the lower part of the tree for balance. For dramatic effects you can cluster several ornaments, combining different colors, sizes or shapes in one bunch, bound together with a ribbon or bow. These can be placed symmetrically throughout the tree or joined and placed as a swag spiraling the tree.

Another important tree decorating hint is to use green coated ornament hooks. They come in two different lengths so you can get an assortment of height when placing ornaments which adds dimension. Most people prefer the green coating because the wire seems invisible against green tree branches. The best thing about these hooks is that you can pinch and lock them so ornaments won't fall off the tree.



8. Dare to be Different

One reason display trees grab our attention is because they dare to be different. You can use actual wood chairs, footballs and sports equipment, garden rakes with vegetables, bouquets of dried flowers and fancy hats blended in the branches of their tree. Adding bold new ideas makes the tree fun and it is certain to create conversation. If you want to decorate your tree with ornaments your children have made throughout the years, be imaginative by adding stuffed animals with Christmas ribbon, train sets, favorite storybooks and a rocking horse. Fill in the ornaments that compliment your child's interests. Make the entire tree your children's story with their personal belongings. They'll love it!

Another interesting way to highlight favorite or heirloom ornaments is to use motion. One of the top selling items over the past several years has been the Ornamation motor, designed to move ornaments up and down or in a circular pattern. You can also add magic to your tree with liquid motion of bubble lights. First appearing in the early 1940's, the colorful fluid lamps have again become a sentimental favorite, reintroduced in a variety of colors and styles. Balance throughout the tree, motion lamps can add an exciting new dimension to tree decorating.

9. The Tree Skirt

Covering the base of your tree can be as thoughtful a process as choosing your tree. After all, the tree skirt doesn't just cover the base of the tree, it is spread out as an invitation for all those gifts to entice us until Christmas day. For a uniform look, tree skirts come with matching stockings to hang on the fireplace. Many homes use a traditional tree skirt handed down from family to family. If you don't have an heirloom, or can't find a tree skirt that fits your theme, use your imagination. Try a favorite quilt or throw, a poodle skirt for a retro theme, colorful rugs or Christmas towels, fabric that ties in with your ornament color scheme or favorite wrapping paper. A children's tree skirt could be pages from a coloring book the children colored and taped together.

10. Topping the Tree

A tradition in many homes is this final tree decoration step lifting the youngest child up to place a special star, finial, bow or angel on top of the tree. This crowning touch creates memories and makes the statement that the tree is completed for another season of family celebration.