

Set Your Christmas Tree Free

Local business reduces tree waste by planting them BY BEN STONE

Purchasing a cut-down Christmas tree can be a sad ritual for the sustainability-minded celebrator, or for those who find their post-holiday disappointment embodied by the malnourished or petroleum-derived tree in the living room.

However, Willamette Valley residents have the option of doing something a little different – renting a potted, living tree from Portland-based The Original Potted Christmas Tree Company (TOPCTC) to be picked up later and planted by conservation groups in local parks and watersheds.

“Christmas trees – as much as we love them and we feel wedded to those kinds of symbols of the holiday – it’s always felt a little bit wasteful,” says Craig Leve, a Eugene resident and TOPCTC customer. “And let’s face it, those plastic trees inevitably look like plastic trees, and they’re disappointing and they’re sad. It sort of fits with our approach, I would say, in life, which is we like the idea that things don’t get wasted.”

TOPCTC say they find it difficult to put into words why they love live Christmas trees. Instead, they liken them to the first four bars of the song “My Sharona” by the Knack – exciting, electric. This unexplainable

feeling has led them to periodically miss Christmas morning altogether.

“Sometimes I sleep right through it because I’m so busy with my business,” the owner of TOPCTC says. Along with several helpers, he works around the clock through December and January to facilitate the drop-offs and pick-ups of naturally shaped firs and blue spruces up to 7.5 feet tall.

Cut Christmas trees have issues. “Your typical Christmas tree, because you’ve killed it by cutting off its roots, even if you keep it in water it dries out, it tends to lose a lot of the needles,” Leve says. “That was much less of an issue with this tree: It’s a living thing.”

Buying a cut Christmas tree grown by a local farm is a fine option – commercial tree farming is a widely celebrated industry for its sustainability. The National Christmas Tree Association reports that on aver-

age, Christmas tree growers plant one to three new seedlings for every harvested tree, and it’s easy to transform Christmas trees into mulch and compost through community recycling programs.

But there is also no substitute for a tree that keeps living and maturing into the tree it was meant to become, producing enough oxygen per year to supply two human beings. The fact that a tree rented from TOPCTC would eventually return to this “state of treefulness” was a powerful draw that convinced Leve to give the service a try.

One doesn’t have to travel far to observe these “re-homed” Christmas trees. Over a four-year period, Brighton West, deputy director of Portland’s Friends of Trees organization, helped plant many of TOPCTC’s

trees along a 6-mile stretch of I-205, from the Columbia River down.

These trees are now visible from the Interstate, branching up over the top of the hill on the west side. All were planted as small Douglas firs, and most have transitioned into their new homes quite gracefully.

“Now some of them are 15 feet tall or something,” West says. “It’s pretty cool to drive down there and be like, ‘Hey, I planted that.’ Some people are probably like, ‘Hey – that’s my Christmas tree!’”

To order your potted tree for delivery, which ranges from \$95-\$100, visit livingchristmastrees.org. **GG**

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– CRAIG LEVE, CHRISTMAS TREE RENTER



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