



GOING *Griswold*

Decorating for the holidays is a long held and respected tradition. No matter where you live, you can find a neighborhood that is transformed by lights and full of holiday spirit.

These neighborhoods often become infamous to locals and become tourist attractions in their own right. For some towns, the pressure is really on. When Christmas is in your name, you have to do it up right. Here's the rundown on three towns that pull out all the stops. Visit www.christmaslightfinder.com to find displays in your area.

NORTH POLE, ALASKA

Living in "the North Pole," how can you not feel the responsibility to show off your Christmas cheer? The town hosts what its citizens call "Christmas in Ice." This is a six-week winter ice park, featuring ice art competitions, ice slides, a maze and ice sculpture demonstrations.

It also has a highly touted kids' park. The festival hosts many other activities, including cookie decorating. The festival concludes with Santa playing in the ice park on Christmas Eve before leaving to make his annual deliveries.

CHRISTMAS COVE, MAINE

Christmas Cove is an actual cove, which means it is pretty empty at Christmas. (Winter in Maine is not a time to be on a boat.) However, just North is Wilton, and Wilton Lights has been a Maine holiday tradition for many years.

The Christmas display at a private residence is set to timers and animated by music, which can be heard by tuning in to a local radio station when you are nearby. Think twice before you travel this year, however. The family that displays the lights at its home is moving across town and has decided to postpone the light show this year.

SANTA CLAUS, INDIANA

If you are ever in Santa Claus, check out its Land of Light — the largest campground holiday light show in North America. The light show tells a story in lights and storyboards, with more than 300 light display pieces stretching more than a mile.

THE PERFECT

Christmas tree

The "perfect tree" means different things to different people, and the merits of a fir versus a pine, tall and slim versus short and wide, are argued at length each year.

But one aspect of Christmas trees on which people tend to hold a strong stance is material: Are you a "real" Christmas tree believer? Or do you prefer an artificial tree?

To help you decide (or sway you in a different direction), consider the following pros and cons of both Christmas tree types.

AFTIFICIAL TREES

BENEFITS

Convenience: Each year, this tree is simply taken out of storage and assembled. Its shape is always "perfect," it won't molt its needles, and it never needs to be watered.

Cost: While the initial investment might be pricey depending on the size and style you choose (pre-lit, dusted with fake snow, or ornamented with pine cones, for example), it is a cost that is only incurred once, rather than every year.

DRAWBACKS

Non-biodegradable: This means when you throw it out, it will be in the landfill forever.

Sizable carbon footprint: More than 85 percent of artificial trees are made in China and shipped to the United States.

Fire hazard: They not only burn easily but act as an accelerant — causing much more damage than if a live tree were to burn in your home.

LIVE TREES

BENEFITS

Made in the U.S.A.: According to the USDA, almost all of the 25 to 30 million real Christmas trees sold in the U.S. every year are grown in the U.S.

Eco-friendly: Live trees are recyclable.

Smell great: A natural deodorizer, there is really nothing like the scent of fresh pine or balsam fir.

DRAWBACKS

Cost: Your cost will depend on the size of tree you choose as well as where you live, but most trees run anywhere from \$20 to \$200 — a recurring cost as one tree will only last the current holiday season.

High maintenance: Needles will begin to litter the floor almost immediately, and live trees must be watered heavily every day.

