

## The Christmas Tree

One of the most common traditions of Christmas is the Christmas tree. Homes across the world decorate an evergreen tree with ornaments, tinsel, and lights. Christmas gifts are placed underneath the tree where they stay until the time comes to open them.

Many stores, offices, and businesses have decorated trees throughout the season. Many government offices and buildings also place trees as a way of celebrating the holiday.

The idea of a decorating an evergreen tree or branch during winter began thousands of years ago in many parts of the world. Because an evergreen tree stays green even in winter, it symbolized eternal life and the hope that spring would come again.



1911 painting of a Christmas tree  
by *Albert Chevallier Tayler*



A Christmas tree in the  
United States

Historians believe the modern Christmas tree began in what is now Germany during the 1500s. Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, is said to have been the first one to add lights to the tree by placing candles on the branches.

It took several centuries for the Christmas tree to become a popular tradition. It was introduced in North America by German soldiers during the American Revolution. In England, the tree was popular with English royalty, many who had come from Germany. Common decorations during the 18th and 19th centuries included fruits, candy, nuts, candles, paper ornaments, and tin stars. An angel or a star topped the tree.

The discovery of electric lights in the early 1900s replaced the candles on the tree. This made Christmas trees much safer. Fruits and nuts as decorations were replaced with glass balls. Artificial trees, or trees made out of aluminum or plastic, also became popular in the mid-1900s.

Today, families around the world establish their own traditions about the type of tree and decorations used. The Christmas tree remains a well-loved part of the holiday season.

### Reading Questions

1. What did the evergreen tree symbolize thousands of years ago?

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2. What were three common decorations for the tree during the 18th and 19th century?

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3. Who is said to have first put candles on a Christmas tree?

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4. Who introduced the Christmas tree to North America?

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5. When did electric lights replace candles on the tree?

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## Reading Questions

Actual student answers will vary. Example of correct answers:

1. What did the evergreen tree symbolize thousands of years ago?

**eternal life and hope for spring**

2. What were three common decorations for the tree during the 18th and 19th century?

**fruits, nuts, and paper ornaments**

3. Who is said to have first put candles on a Christmas tree?

**Martin Luther**

4. Who introduced the Christmas tree to North America?

**German soldiers**

5. When did electric lights replace candles on the tree?

**the early 1900s.**