

## Talkin' Trash *With Chris McCullough*



**Chris  
McCullough**

### Fake Christmas Trees Less Green?

It may seem odd, but cutting down a real tree for Christmas is actually greener than going with the artificial kind, a study shows.

"It is a little counterintuitive to people," says Clint Springer, a biologist at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

Because of concerns over deforestation around the world, many people naturally worry that buying a real tree might contribute to that problem, Springer says. But most Christmas trees for sale these days are grown not in the forest but on tree farms, for the express purpose of being cut.

Moreover, from a greenhouse gas perspective, real trees are "the obvious choice," Springer stated.

Live trees actively photosynthesize as they grow from saplings to larger trees, thus removing carbon di-

oxide from the atmosphere. After they have been cut and Christmas is over, they are usually chipped for mulch as we do here in Douglas County. As mulch, the bits of tree very slowly decompose, releasing carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere. So in the end, a real Christmas tree is carbon neutral, putting the same amount of carbon dioxide back into the air as it took out (albeit much more slowly).

The tree farms that grew the trees also replant after the trees are cut thereby renewing the process and sequestering more carbon.

Artificial trees, on the other hand, do not come out even in the carbon balance. Petroleum is used to make the plastics in the trees and lots of carbon dioxide-creating energy is required to make and transport them around the world.

Because fake trees just end up in landfills after a few years' use, "those greenhouse gases are lost forever," Springer said. "There's really no opportunity to recycle those."

Springer said he suspects that artificial trees have become more popular in recent years because they are more convenient.

Adding to incentives to "go real," this Christmas may also be economic concerns. Artificial trees are manufactured almost exclusively in China whereas real trees are grown locally or regionally in the United States. By purchasing live trees, consumers are contributing to strengthening local economies and sending less money overseas. On the same note, Christmas tree exports overseas are a thriving export business for local farms and brokers.

Remember, here in Douglas County, your real Christmas trees are recyclable. Simply take your to the nearest transfer station and place the tree in the brush bin. Your tree will then be ground into mulch and offered to the public free of charge as ground cover. Please make sure that all ornaments, tinsel, lights, and stands are removed first. And no flocked trees should be recycled. Flocking is pretty, but wasteful. It costs money and renders the tree un-recyclable.

Don't forget to reduce, reuse, and recycle to "Trash Douglas County Less!"

For more information visit [www.RecyclePower.org](http://www.RecyclePower.org).