

Faux fir: Pre-lit and fiber optic lights become more popular in holiday greenery

By RICK GOULD
Record-Eagle staff writer

Whether you put up your Christmas tree Thanksgiving weekend or wait until Dec. 25 for the 12 days of Christmas, it's a sign that the holiday season is underway in your home. And this means the annual trip to a tree lot or the woods to make the necessary selection.

But more and more people are choosing artificial trees. This can mean pre-lit, pre-assembled, fiber optic or other configurations.

Julie and Gordie Sovereign, owners of Garden Goods in Traverse City, say that they go to the annual national Gift Mart in January to select holiday items like artificial trees, greenery and decorations for the next Christmas season.

"Our goal is to find high-end trees that look full and live-looking," said Julie.

Pre-lit trees have a convenience factor that's hard to resist. The customer simply puts the three sections together, plugs the light strand together and then shapes the branches of the tree.

Tip numbers are important since holding ornaments is a consideration in selecting any tree. Most trees list height, number of tips, diameter, light count and price. Trees with hinged branches that fold for easy storage are popular. Some of the newer trees come loaded with extras, including self-leveling stands, electrical power strips and commercial-grade strips. Such trees are assembled in three easy pieces or by unfolding hinged branches.

Although the most popular size

is the 7- to 7 1/2-foot height, taller trees are becoming more popular because so many newer houses have vaulted ceilings. And it's not uncommon for families to have more than one tree, often the "official" tree and another that is a special tree decorated in a theme.

Slimmer trees also are selling well. The "pencil" trees easily fit in a room without major furniture rearrangement. One trend is slim-cut trees that are 30 inches tip to tip — an example at Garden Goods is the Tuscan blue spruce which includes real cones. Slim cut or the shorter 3- or 4-foot trees are popular for those who are older or live in condos or apartments. Cedar bark base artificial trees are also available, ranging from 3- to 6-foot and \$17 to \$50 in price. The biggest artificial trees Garden Goods carries are the 9-foot Dunhill and Kennedy trees.

Artificial trees start selling as early as September. Right before Thanksgiving is the big tree rush, with many people putting up their trees over the long holiday weekend. Fake trees have the advantage over real trees in that they can be put up early without worry over dropping needles or catching fire. Artificial trees can last 10 years or more, depending on how they're cared for.

Some trees don't even attempt to look real. Spiral trees with space for ornaments look like an overly pruned shrub. And the space-age fiber-optic trees that have a light in every sheer needle have become increasingly popular over the past few years. Fiber optic trees come with at least one changeable disk for varying lighting effects.

Ace Hardware carries several

types of plain and pre-lit trees as well as the fiber optic variety. Plain artificial trees are cheapest and those that are both pre-lit and fiber optic are the most expensive. When choosing either pre-lit or fiber optic, price depends on size, quality and number of lights on the tree.

Ace's Traverse City store manager Jason Gothard said he expects that more fiber optic trees and greenery will be sold this year than the previous holiday season.

"Fiber optics are getting better every year and more affordable, too," said Gothard.

A new model at area Ace Hardware stores is a blue tree that is a four-foot glistening Alpine, with a real wood stem with clear or multi-colored bulbs — blue, teal and gold.

Also new at Ace stores are the 3-foot fiber optic trees that continuously change colors, with multi-colored bulbs that light up. On a more lavish scale, Ace is carrying the new 7 1/2-foot Fiberlite tree. This tree has multi-colored mini-lights and fiber optics.

Ace also has a new fiber optic wreath with imitation poinsettias and a wreath with shimmering white lights. The imitation wreaths run from \$14.99-\$29.99.

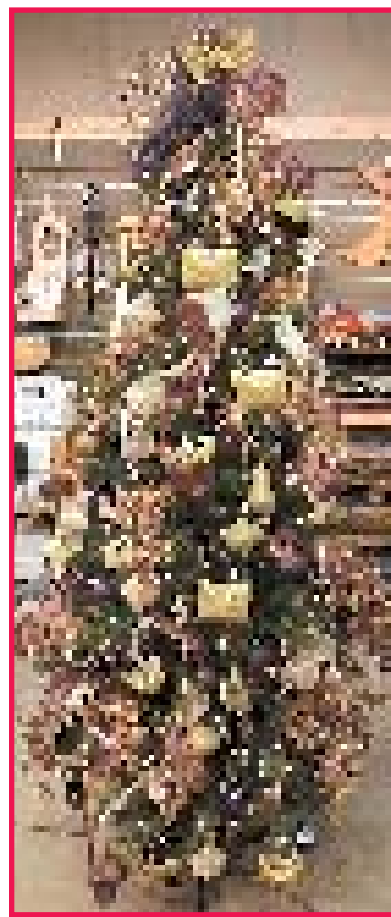
Garden Goods carries a number of pre-lit and plain wreaths as well, some with real cones and winter berries. Some people prefer to decorate wreaths themselves and Julie Sovereign has used elements of decorations from theme trees to demonstrate how to tie the look of a home's tree, wreaths and greenery together. Pre-lit wreaths are new this year and she carries them in sizes up to 48 inches. She said they look great on fireplaces, at the peak of the garage or in a large picture window.

Moss reindeer with red berry garlands are popular and Garden Goods also carries a realistic looking amaryllis bulb, which comes in an artificial moss-covered planter. Artificial sprays make great "filler" for gaps in any tree, plus they add dimension.

Decorations often have themes at Garden Goods and a new one is life-like birds — blue jays, gold finches, robins, bluebirds, cardinals, hummingbirds and more — perfect for that faux fir.

Rick Gould is special sections editor at the Record-Eagle.

Additional information provided by Copley News Service.



Record-Eagle/Jim Bovin
Clockwise from top: A slim-cut tree from Traverse City's Garden Goods; Ace Hardware carries fiber optic trees — this one is multi-colored; Ace's Fiberlite tree, which is 7 1/2 feet and has both multi-colored lights and fiber optics; Garden Goods has life-like bird decorations; one of Garden Goods pre-lit trees, this one decorated Victorian-style; and another of Garden Goods half dozen bird decorations.



Squash Capital of Acme!



Mail Order A Gift from Traverse City!
www.amonorchards.com
1-800-937-1644

- Personal & Corporate Gifts
- Great Stocking Stuffers
- Dried Cherries • Cherry Products
- Fudge • Cherry Concentrate

APPLES • CIDER • DONUTS
Tuesday-Saturday 9-6
(Closed Sun. & Mon.)
(231) 938-9160
2 Miles N. of Acme on U.S. 31

UPS Daily 11-28.99.678616

Introducing the Angel Collection



By **Willow Tree**

Angel Collection

Their gestures and expressive lines bring warmth and grace to any home, and are perfect gifts for any occasion.

Available now at:

KIM'S KORNER

Tom's East Bay, Munson Avenue • 947-0265
Mon.-Sat. 9:30-9:00; Sun. 12-5

Celebrating our 21st Christmas with you!

11-28.99.678464

THE ONLY WAY HOLIDAY SHOPPING COULD BE EASIER.

What More Could You Ask For? Grand Traverse Mall has everything you want for the holidays in one place. More great stores like Rogers & Hollands Jewelers, Holiday Traditions, Victoria's Secret Beauty, Spencer Gifts, Maurice's and Footlocker with thousands of gift ideas for everyone on your list. So come to Grand Traverse Mall this season for the best of everything, except maybe personalized parking.

**U.S. 31 & SOUTH AIRPORT RD. • TRAVERSE CITY
(231) 922-0028**



For a list of extended holiday and Santa photo hours and a complete list of retailers, pick up a holiday directory at Customer Service or at any backlit map location.



11-28.99.678468