

Christmas Trees

As a tradition, celebrating the winter period with an evergreen tree dates back thousands of years. Pagans used branches to decorate their homes whilst Romans used fir trees to decorate their temples. It wasn't until the 16th century that people started to bring trees into the house. It is believed that the first person to do this may have been a German preacher named Martin Luther. The truth is, we just don't know who had the wonderful idea first.

At Home

In England, the tradition is even more recent. Christmas trees became popular in England during the 1850s. This was after Queen Charlotte (the wife of King George III) erected a tree inside Windsor Castle. At first, they were mainly popular with the wealthier members of society.

Decorations

Originally, trees were decorated with candles to represent stars. There are still places across Europe where this tradition continues. Nowadays, some people use a "skirt" around the bottom of their tree. The first ones would have been more like a small carpet or rug underneath the tree. They were used to catch loose needles and wax from the candles. This was important as many of the first trees were smaller and sat on tables.

If a tree was cut down (rather than dug up), it would have been attached to a larger piece of wood. This was often unsightly, and so a small nativity scene may have been placed under the tree to hide this.

Did You Know?

The first tinsel was made around 1610 out of real silver. Unfortunately, silver tarnishes quickly. Soon, other metals had to be used instead. It wasn't even used to decorate trees until the 1800s; before then it was used to hang on sculptures!

Worldwide

Around the world, different cultures have different traditions about what to place on a tree. In North America, they often use garlands of popcorn. Over in Eastern Europe, they hang glass spiders and spider's webs based on a traditional tale. The Swedes are fond of using their national flag to decorate their branches whilst folks from Iceland celebrate the tradition of the Yule Lads. If you choose to decorate a Christmas tree this year, why not look further afield to start some new traditions of your own?



RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. When was the first tinsel made?
2. What can you learn from the **Worldwide** section?
3. What is the purpose of this text?
4. Who erected the first Christmas tree in England?
5. Who used branches to decorate their homes?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I

Find and copy a phrase that shows silver tinsel had problems.

E

Why has the text been divided using sub-headings?

V

Explain why the word **skirt** has been written inside speech marks.

S

Write a paragraph summarising the key points of the **Decorations** section.

Answers:

1. 1610
2. About Christmas decorations around the world
3. To educate readers about the history of Christmas trees
4. Queen Charlotte
5. Pagans

I: Unfortunately, silver tarnishes quickly

E: To make information easier to find

R: Thousands

I: Any suitable summary including the main points about trees originally looking untidy and needing to be decorated/decorations representing stars.