

Q & A

Christmas Trees and MCS

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Q: My son and I have multiple chemical sensitivity and had extreme trouble with our Christmas tree this year. First we bought a live tree, then a fake one. Both caused my son to have bad asthma attacks and we finally gave up on the tree, but Christmas just wasn't the same. What's the problem with trees? Is there something we can we do next year to replace our tree with something safe so we can enjoy Christmas?

A: Live Christmas trees may be sprayed with any number of chemicals which could cause problems in those with asthma and chemical sensitivity. After harvest, trees are often sprayed with a chemical preservative and synthetic pine scent to keep them looking and smelling fresher longer. Pesticides and herbicides are also used in the production of Christmas trees.

Artificial trees often contain formaldehyde and any number of suspect chemicals which make up soft plastics.

The best bet is to locate a Christmas tree farm in your area. These are places where you can go to cut your own tree. Doing so ensures that no chemicals are added after harvest. Check with the farmer regarding pesticide and herbicide use during the growing season.

Another consideration is the ornaments placed on the tree. Many commercially made ornaments have been found to contain high levels various chemicals which exceed the limits set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) when placed in confined settings, such as a home during the winter months when windows are sealed tight.

Alternative decorations include those which you make yourself. Consider popcorn strands, crocheted ornaments, and other crafts the whole family can enjoy making.

Running an air filter is often helpful. If it turns out that allergies or sensitivities are totally incompatible with a Christmas tree, consider placing the tree outside on a porch and leaving the drapes open so that you can enjoy the tree and still keep your air space pure.

