

## **Fake or Fir? Your Christmas Tree's Carbon Footprint**

If you have a Christmas tree in your home, have you thought whether it's better to have a natural tree or an artificial tree? This video could help you to decide.

### **Before you watch**

Complete the sentences using the words below:

landfill, impact, emissions, disposal, recyclable, greenhouse gas, miles, decompose, absorb, carbon footprint

1. Airplanes have an .... on the environment – they have a strong effect.
2. Plants .... carbon dioxide from the air – they take it in gradually.
3. Cars produce a lot of .... when you drive them, carbon dioxide goes into the air.
4. Your .... is the total amount of carbon dioxide that your activities produce.
5. The .... of rubbish can be a problem, especially if it can't be recycled.
6. Rubbish that can't be recycled is often buried underground in a ....
7. Vegetables .... easily – they break down naturally into smaller parts.
8. Carbon dioxide is a .... – we believe that it causes a gradual warming of the surface of the earth.
9. Most plastic bottles are .... – they go through a special process so that the plastic can be used again.
10. In the UK we measure distances on roads in .... – one mile is 1.6 kilometers.

### **Transcript**

It's the ultimate Christmas decoration and British people buy millions of them every year. But what impact does the Christmas tree have on the environment and should you go fake or fir? We're putting the Christmas tree to the test.

First up, the natural tree. Around seven million Christmas trees are bought in the UK each year, with roughly three-quarters being grown here. It takes up to 12 years to grow a typical Christmas tree. During this time it has a positive impact on the environment because it absorbs carbon from the atmosphere and nitrogen from the soil. But once the tree is chopped down, it slowly starts releasing emissions back into the atmosphere. Transporting a tree can contribute to its overall carbon footprint, so buying a tree that's locally grown can help keep its carbon footprint down. But the biggest potential environmental impact for a natural Christmas tree comes from its disposal. If your tree ends up in landfill, its carbon footprint will be a lot higher. That's because organic matter which decomposes away from oxygen produces

methane, a greenhouse gas which contributes to global warming. It's much better if your tree gets incinerated – burnt – or composted. That can reduce its carbon footprint by up to 80 per cent compared with landfill. You can find out from your local council what happens to your Christmas tree once you throw it out and, of course, if you have the space, you can buy a potted Christmas tree, which you can keep over the next year and use again next Christmas.

So what about a plastic Christmas tree? Here, the biggest impact on the environment comes from production. Artificial trees are usually made out of a combination of metal and plastic, the production and processing of which can significantly increase the tree's carbon footprint. And most artificial trees are made in China, which means they have to be packaged and shipped to the UK. The good news is that you can reuse a plastic tree. So how many years would you have to keep it so that it has a lower environmental impact than buying a natural tree? Experts think it's about ten years, but that's a rough estimate that depends on a number of different factors such as the size of the tree. If you do decide to throw out your plastic tree, it's most likely to end up in landfill, as it's not currently recyclable.

Overall, your choice of Christmas tree has a relatively small impact on your annual carbon footprint. To give you a better idea, driving 12 miles in an average-size petrol car produces as much greenhouse gas emissions as buying a natural tree. Or 54 miles if that tree ends up in landfill. If you get an artificial tree, that's roughly equivalent to driving 135 miles.

Of course, there are other factors you might want to consider when you buy a Christmas tree. But in terms of environmental impact, reuse for artificial trees and disposal for natural trees are just two factors you might want to keep in mind.

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### **After you watch**

Try to tell the story to a friend using three new words that you have learned from the video. Also, remember you can read the transcript at any time.

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