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Make Your Holiday Season Environmentally Conscious with These Sustainable Tree Tips

For individuals with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), the holiday season can bring unexpected challenges, especially when it comes to traditional decorations like Christmas trees. Many holiday items contain hidden chemicals that can trigger symptoms in people with MCS, making it crucial to consider healthier, more sustainable options. This guide offers tips on choosing a Christmas tree that's both MCS-friendly and environmentally conscious.

Avoiding the Landfill: Sustainable Tree Disposal

After the holidays, many trees end up in landfills which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. However, here are some ways to dispose of your tree without harming the environment:

1. **Recycle Your Tree:** If you have a natural tree, preferably an organic one, check your community's recycling options, which may convert it into mulch for local parks and gardens. Recycling prevents unnecessary landfill waste and reduces environmental toxins.
2. **Repurpose Artificial Trees:** If you've used an artificial tree and want to switch to a more MCS-friendly option, consider donating it or repurposing it as wreaths, garlands, or décor. This reduces waste and allows others to continue using the tree, helping the environment in



514-332-4320



bureau@aseq-ehaq.ca
office@aseq-ehaq.ca



the process. Artificial trees should be used for approximately 20 years to be more environmentally friendly than natural trees.¹

Artificial vs. Natural Trees: MCS Considerations

Artificial Trees

Artificial trees are often appealing due to their durability and convenience, but many

contain polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and other materials that emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which can affect people with MCS.² 80% of artificial trees are made in China.³ It is important to consider the additional environmental cost of

shipping artificial Christmas trees.³ If you choose an artificial tree, here are some tips to minimize exposure:

- **Select PVC-Free Trees:** Look for artificial trees made from polyethylene (PE) rather than PVC, as they release fewer VOCs.
- **Air Out the Tree:** New artificial trees can release harmful compounds, so it's best to air them out outside or in a well-ventilated area before setting them up indoors.²
- **Choose Locally Manufactured Trees:** Many artificial trees are manufactured overseas and treated with chemicals to survive shipping. If possible, opt for a locally sourced tree to minimize chemical exposure and transportation emissions.



Creating a Healthier Holiday Environment for People with MCS

Celebrating sustainably doesn't mean sacrificing comfort or joy, especially for those with MCS. By choosing safer, eco-friendly options, we can create a holiday experience that is inclusive and health-conscious. Opting for low-chemical trees and making sustainable disposal choices supports the health of those with MCS and promotes a cleaner, greener world. Small changes like these show that sustainability and well-being go hand in hand, allowing everyone to enjoy the holidays safely.

Happy Holidays!

¹ The Two Sides Team. (2016, November 29). Real vs artificial Christmas trees - an environmental perspective. Two Sides North America. <https://twosidesna.org/US/real-versus-artificial-christmas-trees/#:~:text=Average%20households%20replace%20an%20artificial,compare%20favorably%20with%20natural%20trees.>

² RTK Environmental Group. (2021, January 4). Is your artificial Christmas tree toxic? <https://rtkenvironmental.com/healthy-home/warning-hidden-health-hazard-artificial-christmas-trees/#:~:text=Most%20artificial%20trees%20are%20manufactured,especially%20children%20younger%20than%20six.>

³ Petersen, R. (2022, December 20). Real Christmas trees benefit the environment beyond the holiday season, says expert. Virginia Tech News | Virginia Tech. https://news.vt.edu/articles/2022/12/Christmas_tree.html