



The tree that says Christmas

Sudbury author
Barbara Segall has
written a book about
the trees that come
indoors for the holidays

Festivities

Of all the trees
that we
nurture in
our gardens
there is one
beyond all others that we
bring across the threshold into
the house each year... the
Christmas tree. Whether you
have a living tree in a small
pot that you later plant out in
the garden, or a cut tree that
you keep indoors until the
festivities are over, there is
something wonderfully
seductive and festive about →



White Fir - Abies concolor

TREES FOR ALL

*With what shouts of joy we
hailed the pretty Christmas Tree
and with what glee and laughter
we began to search amongst its
twinkling lights and bright green
leaves for the toys and sweetmeats
that were hanging there, each one
with a name written on its
envelope.*

THE CHRISTMAS TREE
ANON. 1857

Above and below, examples of the illustrations by Benjamin Perkins in *The Christmas Tree*

→ going to choose your tree. The aroma from conifers of all sorts is fresh and clean, and on a clear, crisp winter's day, just makes you feel that all you ever wished for will be under the tree.

When I moved from London to Suffolk I lived in a house called Holly Cottage and I began to collect Christmas-related china and I wrote my first book, *The Holly and the Ivy*. It focused on those two plants and how they were entwined in our festive celebrations. I learned that there were so many different holly and ivy species and varieties and I asked a local artist Benjamin Perkins if he would illustrate the chapter opening pages with some of these plants, whose foliage and berries varied so much.

The sequel to that book was *The Christmas Tree*. The field edges of that garden had a number of large conifers – firs, spruce and pines – and it seemed to me that they were probably the indoor Christmas trees of the families who lived in the house before me. I began to look at festive trees each year and discovered how varied their foliage shape and colour can be.

At first sight they look plain and uncomplicated, forest trees that they are, growing tall and straight to reach the light. The needles may not excite us as much as the foliage of our mighty deciduous trees, but on a closer look you can see that they come in a range of greens, greys and shimmering blues. I learned that conifers are among the oldest plants in

the world, dating from the Devonian period, an incredible 405 million years ago!

Then I started to collect small tree ornaments: made in wire, metal, glass, China, paper, and some bristly, almost scrubbing brush trees. Every year I brought them out on a tray to join in the celebrations. And once again I asked artist Benjamin Perkins to illustrate the chapter opening pages for that book.

The first chapter sets the scene for the legends that surround the tree. Our ancestors must have felt that there was something mystical about evergreen plants that held their foliage in winter or conifers with their year-round aromatic needles.

Although branches and garlands of

foliage were at one time used to deck the halls, the Christmas tree's arrival in homes is dated to Princess



Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who married King George III in 1761. She used the traditions of her German childhood to entertain her own children. She decorated small fir trees and hung small presents and fruit from their branches. The popularising of the tradition has always been attributed to Prince Albert, the German husband of Queen Victoria.

Other chapters cover Trimming and Lighting the Tree, Modern Alternatives, Your Own Tree (suggestions for growing your own tree), and Trees for All, which outlines the universal popularity of festive trees.

Most important though is the chapter on Presents under the Tree, for is that not the whole purpose for including these trees in our festivities? Prince Albert wrote a letter to his father in the winter of 1841: "Today I have two children of my own to give presents to, who, they know not why, are full of happy wonder at the German Christmas tree and its radiant candles . . ."

The Christmas tree is well and truly established as a house tree for the 12 days of Christmas...and I wish you all the joys of the season as you choose, decorate and enjoy your own tree.



If you want a signed copy of *The Christmas Tree* posted to UK addresses contact Barbara through her website (www.thegardenpost.com where the book costs £9.99 plus second class postage and packing costs an additional £1.50) *The Christmas Tree* is also on sale at Gainsboroughs' House Museum (<http://www.gainsborough.org>) in Sudbury and at Blackthorpe Barn Christmas Shop, Rougham (<https://www.blackthorpebarn.com>). Barbara Segall is the author of *Secret Gardens of East Anglia* still available in bookstores and Amazon.