

## CHRISTMAS TREES in the BAY AREA 2022

*Nothing says Christmas more than the scent of a freshly cut Christmas tree and part of a fun family tradition can be a trip to an actual Christmas Tree farm. Unfortunately pesticides- insecticides and fungicides- are commonly sprayed on these beautiful trees. Avoid the cheap, and most likely pesticide-laden, tree from the store, support local, no-spray Christmas tree farms.*

Did you know?

The word **pesticide** includes insecticides, herbicides, rodenticides, fungicides, and disinfectants/antimicrobials.



### Why Should You Care if Your Tree Has Been Sprayed With Pesticides?

Pesticides are detrimental to wildlife, plants, waterways, soil and our health. Not only does buying from [tree farms that spray](#)<sup>i</sup> contribute to harming our environment, when you bring that tree home, [pesticide residue](#) often remains on the tree- it can contaminate clothing, get on the skin, and also become airborne dust, which you do not want your family breathing<sup>ii</sup>. Christmas trees are often sprayed with some of the [most toxic insecticides](#)<sup>iii</sup> available because many farms are monoculture farms with only a couple types of trees grown, which increases the likelihood of pest problems and a great incentive to spray to avoid significant crop loss.

While [plastic trees contribute even more to toxification](#) of our land and our bodies than sprayed real trees...choosing a real Christmas tree that has been cultivated naturally without pesticides (including harmful [synthetic fertilizers](#)) is really the only safe, healthy, sustainable choice.

You can be part of changing the culture of the Christmas tree farm industry by buying real trees from farms that do not spray pesticides and letting your voice be heard about what matters to you. Demand creates the market. With increased consumer insistence, we may begin to see certified organic Christmas tree farms.

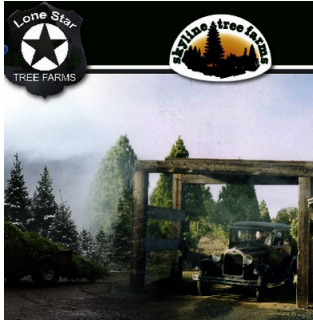


### WHY ARE THERE NO CERTIFIED ORGANIC CHRISTMAS TREE FARMS IN CA?

Lack of consumer demand is the number one reason (and the only [certified Organic tree farm](#)<sup>iv</sup> burnt down a couple of years ago). In order for a tree farm to be organic requires quite a bit of labor, skill, and planning, which means higher cost of trees. If people are not willing to pay more for a Christmas tree to ensure that the environment and people's health are not exposed to toxics, then it doesn't make it financially feasible for tree farms to put in the extra work. For example, an organic tree farm would need a diversity of tree species and other planning and maintenance to minimize pests naturally as well as constant labor to cut brush and poison oak instead of using herbicides. Organic certification is also costly and requires regular re-certification.

Below are 'no-spray' Christmas tree farms in the Bay Area, meaning they don't spray their trees with pesticides. Some of them have used herbicides on poison oak, but the ones listed have not used herbicides for a number of years. Let them know organic is important to you- get your friends and family to buy no-spray trees this year, and help create the incentive for farms to develop organic pest and weed control methods.

## NO-SPRAY TREE FARMS IN LOS GATOS (Santa Cruz Mountains)



\***Skyline Ranch** and **Lonestar Tree Farm** are both owned by the same family who opened their doors in 1958. Owner Donna Lucca said it used to be the norm for all tree farms to heavily spray pesticides. For over 2 decades now, they haven't sprayed their trees, a reality made possible by growing the right tree species, and focusing on proper management. Find out which species each farm grows, and note their hours and locations at

[www.bayareachristmastreefarms.com](http://www.bayareachristmastreefarms.com)

\*Skyline Ranch is a bit closer to the city, busier, and closes earlier in the season. Be sure to check their hours of operation before heading out there.

\***Black Road Christmas Tree Farms** is owned and operated by Robbie Criswell, who has been caring and cultivating beautiful trees since 1966. He has over 50,000 pesticide-free trees! There are picnic tables, so bring a snack and make a fun afternoon of it with the family. Robbie said that there might be a wait to get a parking space on the weekends mid-day, so come on a weekday or early on the weekends. Find out more about their hours and location at [www.christmas-tree-farms.com](http://www.christmas-tree-farms.com)



"I see Christmas trees differently than the normal person." ~ Robbie Criswell



\***Patchen Christmas Tree Farm** has been family-owned and operated since 1969. The owner, Jim, educates others about conservation and using integrated pest management in order to eliminate the use of pesticides. If you can't make it to the farm to cut your own no-spray tree, they **will deliver** all the way up to Marin County! They also cultivate living trees, and will recycle your plastic tree! Find out more at [www.patchencalifornia.com](http://www.patchencalifornia.com).

Tip: Avoid the crowds on the weekends by visiting the farm before 10am or after 2pm.

\***Four Winds Christmas Trees** has been a Christmas tree farm since the 1950s. The new owners bought the farm in 2004, and although they do not mention it on their website, they confirmed via phone that they do not spray their trees. They grow a great variety of 8 types of Christmas trees. If you go, avoid the crowds from 11am-2pm and let them know how important no-spray trees are; you could suggest they advertise that they do not spray their trees with pesticides. [www.four-winds-ranch.com](http://www.four-winds-ranch.com)

## SONOMA COUNTY

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As of this writing, out of the 10 Christmas Tree Farms contacted in Sonoma County, two confirmed they do not spray but one is not open to the public this year (Santa's Trees in Sebastapol). A third stated they haven't sprayed in the past few years. Three farms confirmed that they DO spray, and four didn't respond.

\***Little Hills Christmas Tree Farm** is a family-owned 10-acre farm in Petaluma that has been in business since 1988. They confirmed they do not spray their trees with pesticides. The owner, Carol, likes people to understand that tree farms create a greenbelt, providing homes to birds, owls, ravens, deer, fox, coyote, raccoons, weasels, and rabbits and sequesters carbon dioxide and are water-wise- they don't need irrigation. [www.littlehillschristmastree.com](http://www.littlehillschristmastree.com)  
-Note: they do bring in fir trees from an Oregon farm that does spray- so look for a tree that grows on the property. Also avoid flocking and bagging your tree- the plastic bag is a huge waste, and a flocked tree is not compostable.



\***Larsons Christmas Tree Farm** is another family-owned farm in Petaluma. They said they have not sprayed the trees in a few years, but will if they have to, which indicates they don't have a chemical-free pest management plan in place. They also ship in many of their trees from farms in the Sierras and in Oregon, which are most likely using pesticides, as that is still the norm (until you start speaking up about it and only choosing pesticide-free trees). They're open on weekends only, and do not have a website. Call: 707-762-6317

### **Other tree farms contacted in Sonoma County:**

- Garlock Tree Farm, Sebastapol --YES THEY SPRAY
- Frosty Mountain Tree Farm, Sebastapol --YES THEY SPRAY
- Graton Fire Department Tree Farm, Graton --YES THEY SPRAY
- Grandma Buddy's Tree Farm, Sebastapol -did not respond, but website indicates they do spray
- Celesta Farms, Sebastapol -did not respond
- Reindeer Ridge Farm, Sebastapol -did not respond
- Pronzini Ranch, Petaluma --did not respond

### DID YOU KNOW ?

Christmas was traditionally a 12-day festival extending from December 25 until January 6, which is known as Epiphany or Three Kings Day. The Christmas tree was decorated on Christmas Eve, and not taken down until Epiphany. Many cultures today still have 12<sup>th</sup> night parties on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, and exchange gifts on January 6. Consider a slow 12-day Christmas this year, and avoid the consumer rush through the holiday.

## TOP things to consider when looking for a Christmas tree this year

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1. **Is it free of pesticides?** Many farms spray their trees each year with pesticides, including insecticides and fungicides. The top reasons farms I spoke to say they spray is for poison oak around the trees, and for beetles

2. **Buy real trees.** Christmas tree farms create animal corridors, provide oxygen, sequester carbon, and bring the delightful fragrance and feel of Christmas into the home. Real trees are a recyclable, renewable resource.

3. **Avoid plastic trees.** Artificial trees, most of which are manufactured in China, Korea, Taiwan or Hong Kong are not renewable and consist of toxic plastics, paints and metals, none of which are renewable when made into a fake tree. Artificial tree manufacturing releases tons of poisonous toxins into the air every year. Fake trees are not recyclable nor are they biodegradable. When disposed of (generally after only 3 to 5 years of use), the artificial trees will never deteriorate. Their effects on our environment are evident and will remain for countless generations. The first plastic trees were modeled after toilet bowl brushes- not very Christmas-y!

4. **Buy Local, no-spray trees.** Avoid big box store cheap trees, and tree lots selling trees from out of state. The focus for these companies is cost, not sustainability. Buying local, knowing your grower- which we have the opportunity to do in the Bay Area- supports the local economy and supports the growth of sustainable, eco-friendly tree farming.

5. **Forgo flocking, or netting, or plastic wrap...**only unflocked trees are compostable! Flocked trees go into the landfill. Instead of using netting over the tree, which creates unnecessary plastic trash, bring cardboard/ a sheet, or a tarp to cover your car if needed.

6. **Don't bag up your tree in plastic after the season!** Instead of creating more plastic pollution, simply put your tree curbside so it can be composted and vacuum/sweep up any dropped needles. [www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com) for Christmas tree composting programs and dates in your area.

**FRESH TREE TIP:** if it takes more than 15 minutes for you to get your tree from the farm to your home, plan to cut ½" off the bottom of the tree when you get it home and then put it directly in water. That will help the tree to absorb much more water and stay fresher longer.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN RESEARCHING A TREE FARM/LOT

**\*\*Know beforehand, most Christmas tree farms/growers do routinely spray pesticides on their trees for insects and fungus and they use herbicides around the base of trees to control brush and poison oak. We listed a few no-spray Bay Area farms in the endnotes because no-spray tree farms are hard to find-- but it is not impossible.**

1. Who is the grower? (most lots/nurseries/stores in CA get their trees from Oregon growers). If they can't tell you who the grower is, move on. Otherwise you will not be able to find out their pesticide use.

2. Does the grower have organic or sustainable certification? If not, do they have a no-spray policy (meaning do they not spray any pesticides on the trees)? If not, do they have an integrated pest management plan? Another simple way to learn if they use pesticides, is to ask how they manage pests, fungus, and weeds on the farm.

-the answers to these questions will help you determine how seriously they take managing their farm naturally and minimizing negative environmental impacts.

3. Does the grower plant a variety of trees, or is it a monoculture farm (monocultures increase the likelihood of pest problems and therefore increase the likelihood pesticides are used)?

**\*\*Always let sellers and growers know that you want a Christmas tree from a farm that does not spray-that will plant the seed for them to start looking into organic tree farms and sustainable practices.**

## CUT TREE ALTERNATIVES

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**\*Potted Trees:** Find one that was not grown with synthetic fertilizers. They do need a lot of care to ensure survival. Look for native trees, like they will have at **O'Donnells Nursery in Fairfax**, and **CNL Nursery in Mill Valley**- you can plant it after the season is over.

**\*Rent-a-Tree:** If you live in the South Bay, you can rent a tree from [www.rentxmastree.com](http://www.rentxmastree.com). Located in Carmel, they deliver to the entire South Bay. They have redwoods, firs, and cedars. Call to inquire about their use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers.

- i <https://www.organicconsumers.org/news/christmas-trees-and-pesticides>
- ii <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/77083>
- iii <https://www.publichealth.com.ng/sniper-insecticide/>
- iv <https://www.billysfarm.com/>