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## Christmas Trees: the Best Kept Festive Tradition? Anna Stibbe, The Charter School ND

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Fir trees have been festively decorated for four centuries now: frosted baubles, sparkling fairy lights and starlit angels timelessly encapsulate the enchanting Christmas sentiment.

In South-East London, a Christmas tree's nativity begins at the Streatham and Marlborough Cricket Club. Garlands of radiant lights and neon trees illuminate the South Circular roadside, an enticing Santa's grotto in a location often dulled by rush hour congestion. Pines and Needles is a continually flourishing family-owned business, with its Christmas tree farms sprinkled in various areas of London.

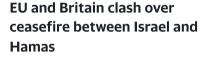
Pines and Needles has rocketed in success as a go-to wonderland for families to begin the first of their annual traditions- bringing home the perfect tree. It started with two

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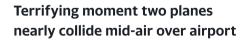


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of their truck to sell in London. "They... built a business around them doing it for fun", says Fiona, manager of the Christmas tree farm in Dulwich. Unlike many Christmas tree farms who source their trees from Scandinavia and the Baltics, Pines and Needles raise their trees in Scotland, honoured by the staff wearing traditional kilts.

After planting, spirited preparations are undergone from August annually, with many teams behind the scenes staging this business overnight so it can thrive for six weeks over the holiday season. This effort never fails to produce sensational results, providing every home a tree to bejewel with ornaments and strings of lights and tinsel tendrils.

Every year a new trend emerges, surpassing old crazes like a boho theme, but Fiona believes Christmas trees are most beautiful with meaningful and perhaps imperfect decoration. She cherishes the power of lots of lights and accumulated ornaments over her life. Classic tree decoration will outlast the magazine-cover goals of many artificial-looking trees tempted by the commercialisation of the holidays. Fiona argues "I don't think that should let [people] ruin the spirit of it, it's just on ourselves as individuals to remind ourselves what our priorities are", emphasising the core values of Christmas: time with loved ones and giving.

Fiona's seasonal occupation could award her title of the real-life Santa, as she only directs the Christmas tree farm for six weeks a year. She wakes up early and eats a hearty breakfast before she bundles up in many layers of warm clothing to open up the farm and welcome customers. After moving to London from the west coast of Canada, Fiona got into Christmas tree trade as her acting teacher offered her seasonal work more embedded in her Canadian culture than pantomime work. Having just graduated from acting school, she is devoted to her acting career for the rest of the year, returning to Pines and Needles' magical Christmas cabin every November like a whirlwind. 2022 marks her third year at the farm and she kindly offers expertise on the best Christmas tree- the Nordmann as they have better shape, stronger branches and don't drop.

Christmas trees are a remarkably long-standing tradition, and Fiona believes after the pandemic, people are getting back on