Nature Newsflash – December 18, 2023

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree, What Are Thy Greenest Choices?

If you set up a Christmas tree in your home, perhaps you've thought about the environmental implications. Your purchasing decision (real or artificial) and your method of disposal (landfill, incineration, or composting) have pros and cons regarding climate change, pollution, and biodiversity.

When you purchase a real tree, you support a farmer who is keeping their land green. The trees on their farm (which grow for about a dozen years before harvesting) clean the air, store carbon, and provide habitat for a variety of species. Production of real trees doesn't result in as much carbon emission as the production and shipping of artificial trees from China. However, it is worth noting that an artificial tree that is reused for a decade or more has its advantages: no matter how someone disposes of a natural tree there are downsides (landfills pollute, while incineration or composting release carbon into the atmosphere). Perhaps the greenest choice is to decorate a live, container-grown tree.

When it's time to give a real tree the old heave-ho, it's probably best to follow Ramsey County's advice: remove decorations and bring it to a yard waste collection site. From there, as long as it's not full of fake snow or tinsel, your tree will be turned into mulch. Disposal is free of charge and sites are located in St. Paul Midway as well as Arden Hills. From now until March, sites are open Saturday 9 am – 5 pm and Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Don't wait too long: if you leave a decaying tree in your backyard all winter, you risk spreading invasive pests. It's also legal to place holiday trees in the trash, but be aware that haulers might charge extra for this.

Submitted by John Pellegrini, resident of Falcon Heights and member of the Environment Commission

Is there something you want to see in the Nature Newsflash, or are you an expert and want to be included in future articles? Send your ideas over to Hannah Lynch, Community Development Coordinator, at hannah.b.lynch@falconheights.org.