

Rent-a-tree firm helps Londoners have a sustainable Christmas

December 8 2023, by Jessica HOWARD-JOHNSTON



Customers choose a Christmas tree to rent at London Christmas Tree Rental in Dulwich, London.

On a crisp, winter's day at a London scout center, seasoned customers picked their way along muddy rows of Christmas trees in pots labeled with their names while newcomers mulled over which one to rent. "It's a

big decision", said one.

With a rise in popularity of artificial trees for environmental reasons, Londoners who prefer a real Christmas tree can now be equally sustainable.

Instead of throwing away their tree in January they can instead return it—having watered it in its pot over the festive season—to a new rental firm that will look after it until the following year.

"We just say it's 'rent, water, return'. After Christmas, return it and we put it back into the irrigation," said Jonathan Mearns, who runs London Christmas Tree Rental.

Mearns, who in another life was a police officer working in counter-terrorism, started the business in 2017 and now has a loyal band of customers who come back year after year.

The business uses a farm located in the Cotswolds in central England, where the trees are irrigated and looked after before being returned for another Christmas.

"It started off as I think what some people would have said was a crazy idea—but it has grown over the years and more and more people are interested in renting a Christmas tree," he told AFP at the center in Dulwich in south London.

"There's big growth, big growth in it. We're not saying we have perfect trees what we say is we have real trees," he added.

Publishing worker Jess Sacco and doctor Rachel Gordon Boyd, both in their mid-thirties, said the green aspect of renting a tree was appealing.

Cutting waste

"We're trying to be more sustainable in general I guess in our lives... we thought it's just a nice alternative to buying a tree and throwing it away," Sacco said.

Mearns says he finds it dispiriting every January to see so many lifeless brown trees abandoned and destined to decompose.

"You will see on the streets of London in January or anywhere around the country, there will be lots of cut trees strewn on the roadside.

"Now those trees are dead, once they're cut they're dead, recovering them is impossible," he said.

The entrepreneur and motivational speaker, who says he is on a mission to reduce waste at Christmas, says that a three-foot (one-meter) tree from his company could be a four-foot tree next year.

The idea has tapped into Londoners' concerns about the amount they throw away and adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

"Because there's so much waste that goes on with chucking them every year. I wanted to have a real Christmas tree but something more sustainable," said Joe Potter, a 36-year-old policy manager said.

"It's something that's on our mind a lot as a family, he added.

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Citation: Rent-a-tree firm helps Londoners have a sustainable Christmas (2023, December 8) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-12-rent-a-tree-firm-londoners-sustainable-christmas.html>

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