4 ways to keep your tree green—if you're keeping it real this Christmas.

By Amy Crelly

Not only do "real" trees smell great and look nice, but they're also all-natural, renewable, and recyclable. (Just beware of pesticides! Choose organic and go with trees that are locally grown—or as close as possible—to reduce transportation emissions.)

Even knowing the eco-benefits of your real tree, it's hard to feel good about the choice you've made when your tree starts looking more brown than green. I mean, let's face it: There's nothing jolly about a dying tree.

Follow these simple steps to keep your tree fresher longer:

1. Cut the Butt
Make a fresh cut by lopping the "butt" off the tree (don't laugh—it's called that). Cut at least ½ inch from the bottom, to remove the sap-clogged end and allow the tree to drink in water. Put the tree in water immediately after cutting for maximum freshness.

2. Make a Clean Stand
Rinse the water reservoir of your tree stand with a mixture of one capful of bleach and one cup of water before inserting the tree. This will inhibit the growth of micro-organisms which can block the tree's ability to absorb water. In addition to being sturdy, your tree stand should be able to hold at least one gallon of water. An average tree can consume between a quart and a gallon of water per day!

3. Give It a Drink—Every Day
Okay, so this is an obvious tip—you want to water your tree. But did you know that if the water level drops below the cut end of the trunk, a seal will form over it and thus

prevent the tree from absorbing any more water? Well, it will. And then you'll have to repeat Step 1: Cut the Butt. So, don't forget to add water every day.

4. Choose Cool Lights

LED lights are not only 90% more energy efficient, but they also produce way less heat, preventing your tree from drying out. (Mini-lights aren't as eco-friendly, but they also produce less heat than traditional lights.)

Want to go super-green this holiday? Living Christmas trees, whether potted or ready for outdoor planting, are the very best choice you can make, for your family and the planet. Check with your neighborhood nursery for more information.