

Drought intensifies Christmas trees' eco-friendliness debate

By Sarah Parvini, Los Angeles Times

Before they picked out an eight-foot Christmas tree, Tara White and Ed Dilks wondered whether an artificial tree might be a more eco-friendly choice.

But after doing some research, the Glendale couple decided that the convenience of an artificial tree didn't stack up against the fresh scent and homey feel of a real tree.

"I felt guilty at first," White said, studying the towering noble fir for gaps. "But it's not like they go into the great forest and kill the trees. It's not deforestation."

The question of which tree is more environmentally friendly – real or artificial? – is resurrected each Christmas season.

But the discussion has gained urgency as California limps through a third year of drought. The debate now hinges on whether plastic trees give the environment a break because they don't soak up a scarce resource, water.

U.S. customers bought about 33 million real trees last year compared with 14.7 million artificial trees, according to the National Christmas Tree Assn., which represents tree farmers. The artificial tree industry cites different figures: About 25 million real trees were sold in 2013 compared with nearly 11 million artificial trees, the American Christmas Tree Association said.

The two groups disagree on plenty of other things.

Read the whole story

