

The last words we heard as we went out through the door were, "Now, don't get such a big tree." I think that my mother probably knew that her admonition fell on deaf ears. For, every December, when we came home from the woods with the Christmas tree, she would be confronted with the problem of dealing with a balsam fir that was wide, tall, and usually thick. Dad often had to cut a little off the top and some--sometimes a lot--from the bottom of the tree to allow it to stand upright. It usually still touched the eight foot ceiling.

We don't look for that kind of tree anymore. Our cabin simply has no space for such a large tree. And, we often choose to cut a tree that will never amount to much of anything. Its only chance for glory is to stand for a couple of weeks in our cabin with little white lights and a few ornaments.

We went to the woods to cut this year's Christmas tree today. It is way too early to put up the tree, though some people now have their trees up and decorated by Thanksgiving time. But, the weather was cold, crisp, and sunny, and we had no snow. So, it was a good time to locate and cut a tree even though it will rest in the woodshed for weeks yet.

The tree we cut today is not very big. It is not very thick, either. But, it has that fragrance of balsam fir that is unlike anything else. I think that I appreciate the smell of the Christmas tree even more than its looks, although even the most modest, self-effacing evergreen is lovely when adorned with lights and ornaments.

But, there again, we fall down on the job. We will have lights on our tree, but other decorations are a chancy business. With Foxy, Raymond, and Muzzy viewing any small item that moves slightly with the least draft as a potential mouse, the possibility of delicate ornaments remaining on the tree for any length of time is, indeed, slim.

Still, we enjoy our Christmas tree. It is fun to go to the woods to hunt up a tree, satisfying to adorn it in some manner in spite of the cats, nostalgia-producing to gaze at it with lights lit after dark, and--nearly as enjoyable to throw it out and reclaim its space after the season is over.

Many of our friends no longer put up Christmas trees, or if they

do, they resort to artificial varieties. Their opinion is that it was mostly for the children in the family and really doesn't add anything to their enjoyment of the yuletide season. Some of them decorate in other ways.

For me, though, the Christmas tree is the highlight of December. Probably, this is partly because the ritual of going with my father to the woods in the weeks before Christmas, hunting for a tree, cutting it and bringing it back to the warm farm house and seeing my mother's resignation when she once again was faced with a very large tree is one lovely memory. And, there is one more reason. We had an aunt and uncle who had no children, and they never had a Christmas tree. I remember always feeling sad about that, and I resolved that, though there are no kids in our household, when any come to visit, they need not feel sorry that there is no tree in our cabin. Plus, it is just as much fun tramping through the woods looking for a tree now as it was decades ago.