

## Decorate your Christmas Tree

Get ready for some sparkling fun!

#### Your Adventure...

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# Your Virtual Adventure starts here...



#### Hi, come in, come in...

Welcome to the Virtual Adventure! I am so pleased you can join me and the other virtual travellers from around the world. Whether you've never been on a virtual adventure before or you're a seasoned virtual traveller, you are in for a lot of fun.

It can feel a little surreal at times; but just go with it. If you relax and let yourself be whisked away on the journey, then you're going to have a great time and make lots of special memories.

#### Coming up with the idea...

My very first virtual experience was a party for my 19th birthday. I was bedbound and feeling really low and lonely. I sent out little chocolate teacakes and candles for my friends to light and sing Happy Birthday! I felt surrounded by them, even though they were miles away. It turned what could have been an awful day into one I really enjoyed.

From there I went on to creating Holidays From Home and then Live in Love in Laugh in. The parties have grown so much over the past ten years and now are all singing and dancing - okay more like audio and cool e-magazine; but they have become what I first imagined. I'm so pleased I get to share them with you now.

I've had so much fun with the virtual adventures, parties and vacations, trying new things, seeing new sights and meeting lots of amazing people. I love having something to look forward to, especially when I feel so left out hearing what other people are up to.

I have my own social life for the first time in years and that is so amazing - and exciting!

Okay so let's get down to the juicy details, how does this Virtual Adventure thing work?





#### Where to start?

First step is to download the complete experience. There's an e-magazine and an mp3 audio.

Can't spend much time on a computer? Me either, so just download them to your electronic device of choice: laptop, smart phone or notebook. Then you can print them off, load them onto your mp3 player, or just browse as and when you are able.

#### Audio or Magazine?

The mp3 has the virtual experience, recorded in my own dulcet (kind of) tones. You can listen to it while relaxing, either with your eyes shut, to help you imagine it or while looking through the magazine where you'll find accompanying photos. If you find visualising a challenge then this makes it much easier.

The magazine also has the written version along with the photos, as well as the recipes and activities you can do to help bring your virtual adventure to life.

You can do as much or as little as you are able: feel free to customise it to your own needs. Do the things you like the sound of and adapt them to your abilities. You don't have to fit it all into a single day, you can spread it out over days or weeks.

#### Share your adventures and make new friends...

We have a virtual hang out for all the virtual travellers. You can find us on Facebook Pop in and say hi. https://www.facebook.com/groups/liveinloveinlaughin

Introduce yourself, jump into conversations, add comments, share any fun ideas you have had for your virtual adventure that others might enjoy too. Don't feel nervous or shy, it's natural, I get like that too; but everyone is warm and friendly. We are all here to have a fab time and sharing the party with others is a huge part of that!

You can also Tweet, Facebook or Instagram your experiences with #virtualadventure

If you do, you'll get a 20% discount code off your next virtual adventure, because there's just so many to choose from, who wants to do just one?

Let me know how you're getting on by tagging @clairerwade

#### Remember...

This is your party - it's all about you having a great time, so do what feels good, adapt it to suit your needs and abilities and most importantly....

Have fun!







## Decorate your Tree



There's a loud knock at your door and you open it to find a large, spiky, green pine tree standing in front of you! You stare at the tree in amazement and are shocked when it suddenly speaks to you.

"Hi it's me!"

You wonder if maybe you're hallucinating. Has the Christmas spirit got to you a little too much? You contemplate shutting the door again; but then a woman's face pops out from behind the tree.

"It's me, Claire!" Claire beams at you. "I've brought some festive treats to get you in the mood for Christmas. Can I come in? This tree's heavy and my arms are beginning to ache."

You step back and allow Claire inside; she staggers slightly under the weight of the tree.

"Where do you want it?" Claire asks you. "Show me the way." She follows you through to where you want the tree and then puts it down with a sigh of relief.

"Phew, that thing is heavy; but it's real - just smell the needles! I think it's so much nicer than an artificial one. Even better this tree still has its roots so it won't drop the pine needles everywhere, all you need to do is water it and then after Christmas you can put it outside and it will last until next year. It's much more eco-friendly and definitely kinder to the Christmas tree.

"I've got some other surprises too," Claire says, putting down a bag. "In here is a special Christmas playlist of festive tunes. Do you want to put it on, while I pop outside to where the rest of the surprises are?"

Having been given a task you put the playlist on and Claire disappears, returning a few moments later carrying an intriguing looking large box. She puts it down very carefully.

"First things first, we need some nibbles and a few drinks to set the festive mood. I've brought some mince pies and a plate of snacks, there's vegetable batons, dips, as well as some crisps and nuts. Help yourself to what you fancy. There's also a bottle of Ginger Wine, we always have it at Christmas, just a small amount made up with hot water, it's a bit like grown up squash. If you'd prefer I also have a flask of non-alcoholic punch."

Claire takes the feast out of her bag and arranges it on a table, so you can help yourself. You feel your stomach rumble and you take a handful of nibbles and begin to eat, while Claire opens up the large box, she lifts off the lid to reveal a tray of sparkling baubles, big bright and shiny glass trinkets that sparkle in the light. It's a box full of treasure and you can't help but gasp.











Claire smiles with delight at your reaction. "Gorgeous aren't they? I'm a complete magpie and love anything shiny, so I've brought along a huge selection of things to decorate the tree. You can decide what we put on. There are lots of colours, you can go for a rainbow tree, or you can be more traditional and classic and stick to a colour scheme. The choice is yours. Have a look through the box and see what takes your fancy."

The box is a bit like Mary Poppins' carpet bag, it has layers and layers of ornaments, the more you take out, the more there seems to be. There are small baubles, long thin icicles, large round spheres, oval bubbles in classic shades of red, gold, silver, green and white; but there are more modern colours of purple, pink, turquoise and blue. It's like looking at glass sweets and you can't resist touching the ornaments, running your hand over the smooth glass curves, the gritty sparkle of the glitter and the soft fuzz of the flocking. There are even some tiny glass birds with feathery tails and some with tails like soft paintbrushes.

"Those feel lovely, don't they? I remember sitting for ages when I was little just stroking the tails across my hand.

"Have you made a decision? What do you want on your tree? You don't have to decide it all now; but if you have an idea you can then decide on the colour of your Christmas lights. If you're going for a specific colour scheme then I think white lights look best; but if you want rainbow colours then there is a set of multicoloured lights. The choice is yours."

Claire hold up two sets of lights, wrapped carefully around special hangers and you reach out and take the set you like the look of. "Don't worry I have already checked they work, the beauty of the new LED lights means no fiddling with bulbs!" Claire says and unwinding the plug she hands it to you to plug in.

"Now you take the lights and you can start winding them around the tree."





You unwind the first part of the cord of lights and take it around the back of the tree. Claire has left it so you can walk all the way around and you move clockwise around the tree, unravelling the lights behind you, spreading them out so that they fall across the branches, winding up and up towards the top of the tree. As you get to the end of the lights you take the final part off the hanger and then wind it around the very top of the Christmas tree, tying a loose knot in the top so that it stays in place. You step back and check where the lights have landed. Some are close together, so you reach in, spreading them out between the layers of branches, feeling the smooth, needles against the back of your hand as you move one cluster across a bough.

"That looks really good," Claire tells you. "Now you need to put the ornaments on. Some of them have little cord loops, while others will need these special tree hooks." Claire opens a pot and you see little plastic hooks which look a bit like unbent paperclips. "I love these, because they hook over the branches and then you can put the ornaments wherever you want on the tree."

You ponder over what to put on first, there's so much choice. You feel a bit like a child in a sweetshop, surrounded by all the pretty, sparkly trinkets.

You decide on a large, glass bauble, which is amazingly light when you pick it up. You realise how incredibly thin the glass must be and how fragile it is and you feel your hand tremble slightly with the thought of dropping it.

Claire senses your fear. "It's okay, it's only an ornament, if it breaks it's not the end of the world; but don't worry I think it's in safe hands. You'll be fine." Claire hands you a metal hook, which you attach to the loop of the ornament and then look at the tree, wondering where to put it.

"That bauble looks quite large," Claire says. "I think you might want to put it on one of the thicker branches nearer to the centre of the tree. It would probably be too heavy for the thin, spindly branches on the edge."





Following Claire's advice you pick a suitable looking branch in the middle of the tree and reach your hand in between the green boughs, searching for the perfect spot. You see a part of the tree which has space and you slip the hook over the branch. You feel reluctant to let go, afraid that the ornament might not be securely attached and will tumble to the floor; but you take a deep breath and gently move your hand back, letting the branch take the full weight. You hold your breath as you wait to see if it's safe or if you're going to hear a crash; but nothing happens and you pull your hand back gently, avoiding brushing the branch again.

The bauble hangs perfectly in a space in the tree, already giving the plain looking pine tree a pretty Christmassy look. If it looks this good with one ornament, what's it going to look like when you've finished?

"That looks great," Claire agrees. "What are you going to put on next?" You see some sparkly, glittery snowflakes and decide that these would look

You see some sparkly, glittery snowtlakes and decide that these would look perfect on the tree. They each come with their own little hook attached, so all you need to do is hang them on the tree. You strategically place them around the tree, making sure you walk all the way around, so that they evenly cover it and can be seen from every angle.

As you stretch your hand into one spot, you suddenly feel a sharp scratch on the back of your hand and you pull your arm back in shock. You can just make out a faint scratch on the back of your palm. The tree has got you!

"Ow!" you say aloud as you instinctively raise your hand to your mouth.

"That," Claire says, "is the hazard of decorating a Christmas tree! Those needles can be sharp; I guess that's why they got their name! Just be glad I'm not making you decorate with holly, because that's even worse!"

You decide not to be deterred and setting your shoulders, you pick up another ornament, ready to do battle. This time you're more aware of the needles and carefully place the tear drop shaped glass bauble without incident.













Next you spot some shiny mental bells, which tinkle as you lift them out. You hang them on the ends of the branches, so that they make a gentle, melodic sound as people brush past them. It's like hearing sleigh bells and your thoughts turn to Father Christmas and presents. The tree will make the perfect home for the presents to sit beneath.

You see a bag full of bushy tinsel and you can thread some of this through the gaps in the branches to fill the spaces, or you can keep the tree more minimalist and forgo it, the choice is yours. Either way you can't resist running the fluffy strands of tinsel through your hands, to feel the soft, tickly sensation. If you decide not to put it on the tree, you can always use it to decorate windowsills and table tops, for instant sparkle and colour.

"Don't forget to put on the decorations you made earlier. They look amazing and they smell of Christmas! If you want, later you could thread some popcorn onto strings and hang them on the tree as well. After Christmas they can go outside for the birds to eat."

Turning back to the box of ornaments, you see there are lots of clear icicles which seem to radiate light, you take them out and see they have gold cord loops which you can hang straight over the ends of the boughs. Their long, thin, elegant shapes help to draw your eye down the tree and add a new dimension.

Seeing the icicles, Claire says "Candy canes are a popular decoration to hang on trees, they seem quite modern; but they date back over three hundred and fifty years. They were originally straight and white; but in 1670 the choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany, bent the sugar-sticks into canes to represent a shepherd's staff. The red coloured stripes were added fifty years later."









You continue to hang the decorations, moving around the tree, pausing to see where there's a space and which ornament would look best. When you think you have finished, you take a step back and admire your work. It looks spectacular, the colours are beautiful and it is the focal point in the room, drawing your eye to it.

"That looks gorgeous," Claire tells you. "You need to put the finishing touches to it though. First there's some beautiful, fine angel hair, which will give the tree some sparkle. "

Claire hands you a mound of thin, metallic strands, it looks like a birds nest; but it's made of tinsel like strands in a faint iridescent colour. You pull out a few strands and drape it over the branches of the tree. It hangs down in a waterfall of shimmering beauty and drifts gently in the slight draft. It looks magical!

"You also have to put something at the very top of the tree, its crowning glory, so to speak. You can choose an angel or a star, both are equally popular. Which would you like?"





You make your decision and standing on tip-toe you reach up, stretching to attach it to the very top spike of the tree. You step back and look at the tree, it looks magnificent. The bright shining baubles stand out dramatically against the dark green of the pine needles.

"Now you need to see it with the lights on, this is when I think that Christmas trees look their best and most magical. You sit down while I turn all the room lights off." Claire walks around the room, switching off lights and lamps, plunging the room into semi-darkness, she then walks across to the plug and stands by the switch. "Are you ready for the official switching on of the lights? Let's count down, in five, four, three, two and one!"

With a loud click, Claire flicks the switch and the tiny, twinkly bulbs burst into light, shining brightly in the darkness. The rays of light spread out like tiny star bursts and reflect off the glittery baubles and smooth glass surfaces. The ornaments glow with colour and that glow seems to spread through the room, giving a soft, warm atmosphere. With the music playing in the background, Claire passes you your drink and you help yourself to some more nibbles. Sitting back in your chair, you feel truly Christmassy.



#### **Shopping List**

Some items you can use to help your party go with a swing. Items are optional, feel free to customise to your own needs.

#### **Cheats Mince Pies**

- 1 pack frozen or fresh pastry shortcrust or puff
- 1 jar mincemeat
- 1 egg (beaten) or a little milk
- flour to dredge
- a round cookie cutter and either a smaller round or a star to top
- muffin pan
- icing sugar, brandy butter or brandy cream, to serve

or a pack or pre-bought mince pies

#### **Quick & Easy Fruit Punch**

- 1 cup cranberry juice
- 2 cups lemonade
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1 oz maraschino cherries
- 1/2 Itr ginger ale
- 1/4 orange (sliced in rounds)

#### **Cinnamon Decorations**

- Cinnamon Dough
- Christmas cookie / biscuit cutters
- Baking tray
- Rolling pin
- A drinking straw or pencil
- Ribbons or chord
- Paints. You can use poster paints, felt pens or spray paints (use outdoors only)!
- Glitter/Glitter Glue.
- Other decorations e.g. bells, pompoms, ribbons, decorative toppers.

#### Cinnamon Dough - Ingredients

- 1 cup (8 oz) Ground Cinnamon
- 1 Tbsp. of Cloves
- 1 Tbsp. of Nutmeg
- 3/4 cup of Apple Sauce (see below)
- 2 Tbsp. of Glue (non-toxic)

#### Apple Sauce - Ingredients

- 2 medium apples or 3 small apples makes 1 cup
- 1 tsp Lemon juice
- Pinch of Salt





### History of Christmas Trees



#### Why do we have Christmas Trees?

The tradition of bringing evergreen trees and foliage into your house, dates back to the Romans, who decorated their houses for the New Year. Evergreen was a symbol of new life and renewal.

The first Christmas tree was said to have been invented by Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer. It is said that Luther was walking through a forest near his home in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1536. It was a cold, dark winter's night and Luther looked up and saw thousands of stars glinting through the branches of the pine trees. It was such a beautiful sight, that he was inspired to set up a fir tree in his house, lit by candles, to remind his children of Jesus and the stars of heaven.

There is little proof of this being true; but the first Christmas trees were recorded in Latvia in 1510 and Strasbourg in 1521.

The custom was well established by 1605 when someone in Strasburg recorded they 'set up fir trees in the parlours ... and hang thereon roses cut out of many-coloured paper, apples, wafers, gold-foil, sweets, etc.'

The first Christmas tree in England was credited to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort in 1840; but in fact 'good' Queen Charlotte, the German wife of George III, set up the first known English tree at Queen's Lodge, Windsor, in December, 1800. She wanted to do something special for the children, so instead of bringing the traditional bough in, she brought a whole spruce tree in and decorated it with sweets and presents.

The upper-classes were so taken by the idea of a Christmas tree, that they adopted the tradition; but it wasn't until 1840 when Prince Albert imported spruce trees, that the new custom began to be recorded in newspapers. They became more and more popular, spreading across the world. Now you can't turn on the television or enter a shop in December and not see a sparkling Christmas tree.





Today not everyone has real pine trees, some prefer artificial trees, while others have reverted to the older custom of just bringing in a single bough to decorate.

Often cities have large Christmas trees which stand in a central location, for example The Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree in New York and the tree in Trafalgar Square in London.

The Trafalgar Square tree is a regular gift from the king of Norway, it is given to England in remembrance of the help the country gave Norway during the Second World War. The tree is usually over 20 meters high and 50-60 years old.

#### Why decorate a Tree?

People used to believe that when the trees lost their leaves in the autumn, that it meant the tree spirits had abandoned their homes. Strips of coloured cotton were tied around the bare branches, to tempt the spirits back in Spring, so that the trees would grow leaves again. This tradition linked up with bringing a tree indoors, so it was natural for people to put decorations on their Christmas trees. Originally they were homemade decorations of apples, cakes and sweets. Woolworths sold the first manufactured tree ornaments in 1880.

Nowadays decorations are available in lots of different colours; but red and green are the traditional colours of Christmas. Green symbolises evergreen, life continuing through the winter which ties in with the Christian belief in eternal life through Jesus. Red symbolizes the blood that Jesus shed at His Crucifixion.

Originally the Victorians used candles to light their trees, like Martin Luther; but this was a dangerous tradition as the whole tree could catch light. Fortunately these were replaced by strings of Christmas lights.

An angel or star is usually put on the very top of the tree, both are symbolic to Christians. The star represents the bright star which guided the Three Kings to Bethlehem and the birth of baby Jesus, while the angel brought glad tidings of great joy to the shepherds in the field.

#### Decorate an Online Christmas Tree

Have a go at decorating these online Christmas Trees.

- http://www.whychristmas.com/fun/decorateatree.shtml
- http://boowakwala.uptoten.com/kids/boowakwala-events-christmas-2000-tree.html
   click on the ornaments then click again and drag in place.
- http://www.apples4theteacher.com/holidays/christmas/decorate-a-tree/





## O' Christmas Tree?

O Christmas Tree is a traditional German Carol. The author and composer are unknown. You can hear the tune here... http://www.kididdles.com/lyrics/o050.html There are many different versions of the lyrics, this is one of them.

#### Christmas tree

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree Thy leaves are so unchanging O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree Thy leaves are so unchanging

Not only green when summers here But also when it's cold and drear O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree Thy leaves are so unchanging

#### **MmMmmmMmm**

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree Such pleasure do you bring me O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree Such pleasure do you bring me

Oh every year this Christmas tree Brings to us such joy and glee O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree Such pleasure do you bring me

(sleep in heavenly, sleep in heavenly)

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree
Oh ever green unchanging
A symbol of good will and love
You'll ever be unchanging
Each shining light each silver bell
No other light spreads cheer so well

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree You'll ever be unchanging





Why not sing along to one of these famous versions of O Christmas Tree...

- Aretha Franklin http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NZwWK3GXhg
- Glee http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a\_Y-eDM-3Cw
- The Chimpmunks http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJF46UAVfJw
- Boney M. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3dK8EVo3So

#### Christmas Tree Jokes

What happens if you cross an apple with a Christmas tree? You get a pineapple!

Why are Christmas trees like bad knitters? They both keep losing their needles!

What do you get if you eat Christmas decorations? Tinsilitis!

What did the beaver say to the Christmas Tree? Nice gnawing you!





### Cheats Mince Pies



#### Makes 12

#### Ingredients

- 1 pack frozen or fresh pastry shortcrust or puff
- 1 jar mincemeat
- 1 egg (beaten) or a little milk
- flour to dredge
- a round cookie cutter and either a smaller round or a star to top
- muffin pan
- icing sugar, brandy butter or brandy cream, to serve

#### Instructions

- 1. Preheat oven to 200°C.
- 2. Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface to 3 to 5mm thick.
- 3. Using your cookie cutter cut out 12 large circles and place them into the wells of the muffin tin.
- 4. Add a teaspoon of mincemeat to each pastry case.
- 5. Cut out smaller circles or stars and place them on top of the mincemeat.
- 6. Brush with beaten egg or milk.
- 7. Bake in the oven for 10 minutes, or until golden brown.
- 8. Leave to cool in the tin for five minutes and then lift out with a spoon. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.
- 9. Serve dusted with icing sugar. Delicious with brandy butter or brandy cream.

Alternatively buy a pack of mince pies and then warm them in a low oven. To give them the homemade touch squash them slightly with a rolling pin before serving and dust with icing sugar.





## Quick & Easy Fruit Punch



Serves 10

#### Ingredients

- 1 cup cranberry juice
- 2 cups lemonade
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1 oz maraschino cherries
- 1/2 Itr ginger ale
- 1/4 orange sliced in rounds, to decorate

#### Instructions

- 1. In a large jug or punch bowl, combine cranberry juice cocktail, lemonade, and orange juice. Stir in the maraschino cherries.
- 2. Refrigerate for 2 hours or more.
- 3. When ready to serve, pour in the ginger ale.
- 4. Garnish each glass with an orange slice.





### Cinnamon Ornaments



Create your own ornaments out of non-edible cinnamon dough. You can paint them or decorate with glitter glue. Makes about 12, depending on size.

#### You will need:-

- Cinnamon Dough
- Christmas cookie / biscuit cutters
- Baking tray
- Rolling pin
- A drinking straw or pencil
- Ribbons or chord
- Paints. You can use poster paints, felt pens or spray paints (use outdoors only)!
- Glitter/Glitter Glue.
- Other decorations e.g. bells, pompoms, ribbons, decorative toppers.

#### Cinnamon Dough - Ingredients

- 1 cup (8 oz) Ground Cinnamon
- 1 Tbsp Cloves
- 1 Tbsp Nutmeg
- 3/4 cup Apple Sauce (see below)
- 2 Tbsp Glue (non-toxic)

#### Apple Sauce - Ingredients

- 2 medium apples or 3 small apples makes 1 cup
- Water
- 1 tsp Lemon juice
- Pinch of Salt





#### **Apple Sauce - Instructions**

- 1. Peel and core the apples. Chop into rough 1" pieces.
- 2. Place in a pan or microwavable bowl and cover the base with water.
- 3. Add the lemon and salt.
- 4. Either bring the pan up to the boil and then reduce the heat, cover and leave to simmer until the apples become soft about 20 minutes.
- 5. Or cover and heat in the microwave on half power for about 10 minutes, checking to make sure it doesn't boil over and stopping once the apples are soft.
- 6. Mash or puree the fruit until smooth.

#### Cinnamon Dough - Instructions

- 1. In a bowl mix together the cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, applesauce and glue.
- 2. Work the mixture with your hands 2 to 3 minutes to form a ball. If the dough is too wet, add more cinnamon. If mixture is too dry, add more applesauce.
- 3. Lightly dust a clean surface with cinnamon. Roll out the dough to 1/4 inch thickness.
- 4. Cut out shapes with the cookie cutters, and use a straw or pencil to make a hole at the top for hanging with a ribbon.
- 5. Dry in a low oven 90°C (200°F) for several hours, or air dry in a sunny spot for 4 or 5 days. When dry, decorate with paint, glitter or other decorations. Add ribbon to hang..

N.B. If you don't like cinnamon, you could make salt dough. Or if both sound like too much work, you can use Air Dry Clay. Follow the instructions on the packet.

Make sure you take a picture of your ornaments and share them with your fellow party goers in the Facebook group.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/liveinloveinlaughin/







## Christmas Movies

Nothing captures the feeling of Christmas quite like a Christmas film. There are lots to choose from, these are some of my favourites.



- A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
- Home Alone
- The Christmas Tree
- A Wonderful Life
- Serendipity
- Miracle on 34th Street
- Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone
- Holiday Inn
- Christmas in Boston my personal favourite!
- Christmas with the Kranks
- FIf
- Love Actually
- While You Were Sleeping another favourite!

You can see more Christmas films here... http://eclecticesoterica.com/christmas\_movie.html

What are your favourite Christmas films? Let us know in the Facebook group!





## More fun awaits you with new adventures...

















## Enjoy them now. Go to www.etsy.com/uk/shop/ClaireRWade













