



RED CEDAR—Less well known than the more popular pine and spruce, the red cedar is frequently used for a Christmas tree where it is abundant.

point of conservation, no one worries about the use of mistletoe as a Christmas green. It grows not in the soil but high on the limbs of trees and harvesting it frees the timber tree from the harm that it does. One reason that it is likely to be expensive is that harvesting it is difficult. In the South, where most of the American supply comes from, men knock clumps of it out of trees with charges of buckshot.

The use of trees and greens in connection with the celebration of the midwinter festival that we call Christmas seems to have originated in connection with religious rites and customs which antedated Christianity. Customs similar to these used at our modern Christmas were in existence more than 5,000 years before the birth of Christ. Green boughs were used to decorate houses in the ancient world because trees were worshipped by early peoples. The ancients worshipped the sun and held festivals to honor the sun gods at the time of the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. The Goths and the Saxons called this midwinter occasion Yule.

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At the same time of the year early Egyptians bedecked their homes with sprays of palm trees. Germanic tribes decorated fir trees. The Romans during their feasts to Saturn used boughs of evergreen and laurel. The evergreen fir was revered by both the Greeks and the Scandinavians at their winter rites. Life eternal was symbolized by mistletoe and green boughs in Druid lore. In Norse mythology, the evergreens represented the revival of Balder, their sun god.

Because these usages were linked with religions that the Christians considered pagan, in early England the church opposed the decoration of homes with greens and the hanging of mistletoe in churches. But the origins of these customs were gradually forgotten and the decoration of churches at Christmas became usual.

Some of the Christmas plants are more modern than evergreens. Poinsettia with its bright red bracts, or modified colorful leaves, is a common Christmas flower, which is caused to flower by the short days and long nights of the Christmas season.

Gas, oil and coal central heating has outmoded the open fireplaces of earlier days and with this modernization the custom of the Yule log has almost disappeared. The Druids of old made the burning of the Yule log a ceremony. They appropriated it from the old Vikings who celebrated the Yule festival at winter solstice and dedicated the burning of an oak log to mighty Thor of the hammer, son of Odin. The Norse and Druid rite was adapted to the Christmas holidays in medieval England and once was widely practiced in America.

Toys, gift giving and card sending have assumed increased importance in the modern Christmas and the origins of what we do have been lost in the rush of our present busy life. The tradition of Christmas cards is said to date back only a little over a hundred years.

Science News Letter, December 15, 1951

SURGERY

Keep Patients Alive by Pinching Heart's Aorta

► AN EXTRA aid for keeping alive a patient whose heart stops on the operating table is reported by Dr. Max G. Carter of New Haven, Conn., in the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (Dec. 1).

It consists in pinching closed the aorta, big artery that carries blood from the heart. The pinching is done at a level that keeps blood from going to the lower part of the body, so that as much as possible will go to the brain and the heart muscle itself.

This maneuver, in addition to heart massage and other restorative measures, is credited with saving the life and mentality of a patient whose heart stopped beating for 25 minutes.

Science News Letter, December 15, 1951

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