Give Christmas tree a second life

Get more green from your pine

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You paid a lot of money for a fresh Christmas tree just weeks or days ago, so it seems a shame to just toss all that cash in the trash.

While that evergreen may not appear so green anymore, there are many ways it can continue to serve a purpose. Here are five ideas to help you get the most for your Christmas tree money this year.

1. Toss it in on the fire: Use a few dry branches as kindling to start your fires. It smells fabulous but burn with caution: Christmas trees are highly flammable and contain a lot of resin, which produces more creosote than hardwood trees.

2. Tree-mendous trellis: Trim the branches and prop the tree up in your garden. It makes an excellent trellis for clematis, purple hyacinths, morning glories or other climbing vines. A tree trellis lasts only one season, but you can't beat the price. Trim the branches off, but leave some for vine support. Sink the trunk in the ground.

3. Let it swim with the fishies: Christmas trees make great habitat for fish. Make sure, however, that you securely anchor it to the side of the pond or lake, so it won't impede water flow and will control erosion.

4. For the birds: Your discarded Christmas tree can serve as a naturalized feeding station for wildlife. Lay the tree on its side in a sheltered corner of your yard and scatter birdseed around it. Or "plant" your old tree in a bucket filled with sand and decorate it with pine cones slathered with peanut butter. Other ways to feed wildlife include smearing suet in the branches or hanging fruit slices from the branches.

5. Wood-chip mulch: If you have access to a woodchipper, strip the branches and turn the trunk into mulch. Evergreen chips can be used just as you'd use any wood chips, except that they also smell great.