TRIMMING THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS TREE:
The Marginal Merriment Approach

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There are many theories as to how you go about trimming the perfect Christmas tree. Some argue for a rigid theme or color scheme, as to amplify the overall effect of the tree and enable you to exude smug superiority. This tree philosophy is very popular with reality show stars, most notably the Kardashian family.

Others adhere to Chaos Theory, allowing anyone to hang an ornament wherever they please. While enjoyable during the actual decorating process, this is not a sustainable approach as you will grow to hate your tacky, disorganized tree.

An alternative approach is "Marginal Merriment." This allows for some flexibility, but with a standard of excellence. I've outlined some guidance on how to decorate your tree using this approach to ensure you end up with more than a Charlie Brown Christmas.

As soon as you have your tree in the stand and upright, it's time for lights. Ideally you would have wound your lights from last year around a piece of cardboard to keep them from tangling, but you were probably over the whole Christmas thing by then and just stuffed them in the box. Make sure the kids aren't in the room for the untangling process, as there may be words you don't

Now it's time to put on your ornaments. Your first instinct is likely to want to do this as a family activity. Ignore this urge. Everyone else will complain, they won't adhere to the guidelines, something will end up broken and someone will end up crying. Just pour yourself a big glass of wine, put on your favorite holiday movie (acceptable films include It's a Wonderful Life, Elf, Scrooged, Home Alone, Christmas Story, Frosty the Snowman, Love Actually and Die Hard) and start hanging.

Your attachment to each ornament determines where it should be placed on the tree. Boring ornaments should go on the inside of tree (these are usually your standard colored ball decorations that likely came in a six pack). Anything your mother-in-law gave you that you're not crazy about but need to keep in order to maintain family peace can go in the back.

If you have small children or pets, place the ornaments you would like to see broken on the bottom. Alternatively, you can place non-breakable ornaments in this area, but small children will find a way to destroy them too. This can also be a good place for the dozen popsicle stick ornaments made at school that look nothing like Rudolph.

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want them to learn just yet. Test them before you start to be sure you don't have to find the one light that is out in a sea of 600 bulbs.

Let's clear something up now: there is a right way and a wrong way to put lights on your tree. Start from the bottom and wind your way up, leaving a consistent space between the branches. The height of your tree will determine how many lights you'll need. To save yourself an extra trip to Target mid-decorating, plan for 100-150 lights per vertical foot.

Next comes the garland, should you choose to use it, but it is highly recommended. It helps fill out the tree if you're light on ornaments and adds a different texture and dimension to the overall décor. Actually, not optional: get some garland. Using the same method as your lights, place your garland from bottom to top.

All the cherished family ornaments should be higher than four feet, with heavier ornaments on the sturdier branches near the top. Anything with a bell should be 4" higher than arm span of your tallest child.

You have a little flexibility with the tree topper, and can opt for a star or angel, depending on personal preference. Again, do not attempt to have a child put on the topper. They will take down the rest of the tree. Tell them elves came in and handled it while they were sleeping.

Now sit back and relax in the warm glow of your perfectly decorated Christmas tree with another glass or two (or three) of wine. Just be sure to hide all of your empty bottles by morning.