
A “firefly tree” in Papua New Guinea — not genetically engineered, just full of fireflies.

(Warning — tongue firmly in cheek.)

Megan and Dan have written on how an environmentally-minded winter holiday enthusiast should choose between a real and an artificial Christmas tree. The comparison already isn’t easy, but it could get even more complicated. What if the “natural” tree were genetically engineered to glow in the dark?

Two UK graduate students say it could be done. Remember GloFish (“available in five striking colors”!)? The principle is the same — put a gene for a fluorescent protein and a firefly gene for the enzyme that activates the protein in the needles of a Christmas tree and voila, self-lighting tree, potentially in your choice of colors. No need for electric lights, LED or otherwise.

The students, who submitted their idea to a competition (don’t worry, they don’t appear to be actually doing this), say it’s perfectly feasible.

> The only problem in reality is the cost . . . We calculate that the initial trees would cost about £200, which means going for the upper end of the market. But I’m sure a lot of people would love them, especially the Americans.

What do you think, life cycle analysts? More or less environmentally correct?

(Hat tip: Cool Green Science.)