

# Phones and watches are getting smarter — and expensive



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I have never been one to embrace technology, always preferring to do it the old-fashioned way. The biggest problem with technology is how quickly it becomes outdated, leaving the old version useless.

My wife and I had been toying with the idea of updating our cell phones and looking into one of those smart watches. After many years of discussing the upgrade, my wife's phone died, probably of natural causes, so off to the phone store we went.

After several hours of haggling, paying over half of our net worth, and most of the kid's inheritance, we were the proud owners of 2 new smart phones with matching smart watches. The salesman assured us these were the absolute latest in technology, so new in fact, the ink is not yet dry on the patent. He also told me the watch was so smart, it will be like having a personal assistant on my wrist, everywhere I go.

Feeling like I got a bargain, to obtain such technology, we loaded up in the truck and drove home. Glancing back in the rearview mirror, I noticed all the sales team doing a happy dance, interlocking arms and throwing handfuls of cash into the air. Little things

like that always make me feel a bit uneasy about the "deal" I got.

Getting the phones home, the first thing we needed to do was give them a full charge. While they were charging, I received an email from the cell phone company, thanking me for my business and offering me a deal on a new phone and smart watch as the latest and greatest is now available and the one I just bought is outdated, soon to no longer be supported by the manufacturer. Another little thing to make me feel uneasy about my great deal.

I must admit the new phone is pretty impressive. It is like walking around with a computer in your hand. I have access to my email, the internet, banking, shopping, and can even watch television. I can carry an entire library of information with me, everywhere I go.

The phone has a camera, with a 30-power optical zoom, and takes better pictures than I am capable of. It also has an editing program that makes the pictures better, corrects many of the errors the photographer makes, and crops the pics down to size. I can even order prints from the phone.

For an outdoor person, the newer phones are incredible. No longer do you have to carry a separate camera. Gone are the days of f2 at 125 settings as this does it all automatically. It even has a gallery for storing your pictures and uploads them to a cloud for safe storage that you can access from any computer.

The new phones have far more capability of storage than the phones of a few years ago. An

outdoor person can carry books on edible plants, survival skills and first aid, all in your pocket. This reference material may save your life one day, and it gives you something to read while you wait for search and rescue at the very least.

The biggest advancement is the upgrade in the GPS capabilities of your phone. There are many mapping programs, some free, you can download. The GPS on your phone works independently from your cell service. You do not need cell service to utilize the GPS.

Programs can be used to track your hike, allow you to drop markers, such as camp or your vehicle, and give an accurate location of your current position. Some of these apps require you to download a base map with Wi-Fi at home, then you do not need cell service to use the map.

One of the mapping programs you might check out is the free version of Cal/Topo. This program is also available to first responders in a pay version with many more enhanced features. The free version works great for the average hiker or backpacker.

A pay version I strongly recommend is the OnX maps. This was originally designed for hunters, but it is very useful for anyone who goes off-road in the woods. Their program allows for satellite imagery to be used as a base layer for the map and offers a 3-D view of the area, giving a different perspective to the terrain.

The salesman was correct about the watch being like a personal assistant. After many weeks of a learning curve, I have



My watch of many years is now considered "dumb" in the era of smart watches. Sometimes we need to leave well enough alone. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

finally realized it's worth. You have an app on the watch that allows to make phone calls, send text messages, access Google maps, and a score of other things, just by talking to your watch.

It allows me to send a text message without having to touch my phone. No longer do I have to use fat, arthritic fingers to send a brief message to someone. When I am looking for an address, I can ask the assistant and the directions magically appear on the screen in my truck.

The new watches and phones gave our family finances a double hernia, but they have made some tasks much easier. I told my wife that I can watch hunting and fishing shows anywhere now on this phone, giving me something to do when we visit her family, although she did not share my enthusiasm. Just the other day I told my wife a joke. She laughed, I laughed, and my watch laughed. I guess I need to stay up on this technology better in the future. I like having a personal assistant.

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## A tree for now and years to come



## Gardening From A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

Wow! It's definitely beginning to look a lot like Christmas everywhere I go. It's my favorite time of year. I love the excitement and stores full of festive decorations including all of the little conifer trees that I've been seeing. However, I wonder how many of these cute little trees will be around this time.

I'm sure some people buy these trees with the idea of tossing them into the trash along with the wrapping paper once Christmas is over, but that's too sad to even think about. I hope people buy them with the intent of having a great tree that might be transplanted into the yard or used as a houseplant after the holidays. And you have to admit, some of those little trees are pretty darn cute when they're in a festive pot, decorated like a gnome or elf, or strung with small battery powered lights.

Just think, you could put those little trees all over your house, even the kitchen or bathroom. And they would make a fantastic hostess gift.



A little table tree can say Merry Christmas now as well as for generations to come. (Courtesy photo)

I wonder how many of you may have bought a living little tree with the thought that a living tree is an environmentally correct thing to do. If your tree is zoned for our area it's a great idea!

Regardless of the reason behind buying a little tree that might serve double duty, I have a couple of concerns. The first is some of the trees that I saw for sale were Norfolk Island pine trees. These trees are actually considered a houseplant and will eventually grow taller than your ceiling. But you can deal with that when the time comes.

The main thing is, don't put it outside after Christmas if you want it to live.

The other even bigger concern that I have is that many of the little trees that I saw were spruce. Now it's not that I have a problem with spruce, (I love spruce) it's just the fact, that the tree has probably broken dormancy during its stay in the house or during its temporary visit at the store. It only takes an indoor stay of about 3 to 5 days for the trees to think spring has arrived and it starts to break dormancy. At this point the buds will start to swell and the

tree will have lost its winter protection and it will freeze if you place it outdoors! The same holds true with the cute little junipers or any of the evergreens for that matter.

If you have room in your house for a little tree you should treat it like any other houseplant for the winter. Place it near a sunny window and water it when the soil becomes dry to the touch. Rotate it occasionally so it will have even sun exposure. If you purchased a larger size living tree and it has broken dormancy you could put it in the garage for the remainder

of the winter. It really is pretty much the same process; place it next to a sunny window, turn it occasionally, and water it when the soil feels dry to the touch.

So let's think positive. That cute little tabletop tree just may grow up to become a 100 foot tall tree some day. So give some serious thought to where you want the tree to grow before you plant it. Look up to see if overhead power lines will become an issue for your mature tree. Will the branches hang over the sidewalk? Will the tree become so large that it blocks the entrance to the house? Will the tree block your view when backing out of your driveway, or will it block a view to the mountains? These are all good questions that should be asked before you plant the little guy. Spruce, for example, need a lot of room to grow!

I know, you're probably thinking it's going to be years before that tree will be big enough to even be noticed, but you may be surprised by how fast they will grow. In fact, a smaller tree will actually establish quicker and grow faster than a larger tree. And why not think about planting the little guy for future generations to enjoy? Now that's a great Christmas present!

Whether you have a little Christmas tree or not, I hope you'll enjoy the holiday preparations and have a Merry Christmas!

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