

Home & Garden Mimeo # HG 45

Selecting and Caring for the Cut Christmas Tree

If you want your holiday season to be free from the dangers of fire, make certain that the Christmas tree that you are buying is fresh. Freshly cut Christmas trees have needles that are full of water and will resist burning. To make certain that your tree is fresh, you may want to cut your own at one of the many [“Choose and Cut” Christmas tree farms](#). Choosing and cutting your own Christmas tree is a good family activity that is gaining in popularity.

If you cannot choose and cut your own Christmas tree, the next best thing is to select a fresh tree from a local sales yard as soon as they are made available. Sales yards do not provide adequate storage facilities to keep Christmas trees fresh. The sooner you select yours and bring it home to care for it properly, the fresher your tree will be.

Choosing A Christmas Tree

Christmas trees come in a variety of sizes, shapes, and species. Each family has its own preference as to species and each home can only accommodate a tree of a certain size and shape. To make certain that the tree that you select will best meet your needs, visit the sales yard in the day-time. It is much easier to examine and choose a Christmas tree under daylight conditions than from under the light of a few scattered light bulbs.

Christmas tree growers grow a large selection of trees in order to satisfy the demands of their customers. Species may include: Balsam fir, White fir, Douglas fir, Fraser fir, Scotch (Scots) pine, White pine, Red pine, Austrian pine, Virginia pine, Red spruce, Black spruce, Norway spruce, White spruce, Colorado-Blue spruce, and Red cedar.

Testing For Freshness

To be sure that the tree you’re selecting is fresh, follow these few simple steps after selecting the tree that will best meet your needs:

1. Gently grasp a branch with your fingers and pull towards you. Very few needles should come off in your hand. Inspect the needles closely to see if they are well-filled and turgid. If the needles look a little whitish or shrunken, chances are that the tree has already begun to dry out.
2. Needle brittleness is also another good indication of freshness. Grasp a few needles between your thumb and forefinger, and bend them under your thumb at approximately right angles and give a steady pull. If the needles bend without breaking, this is a good indication that the tree is fresh.



Eastern White Pine



Norway Spruce



White Spruce



Colorado Blue Spruce



Eastern Redcedar

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- Needle retention is also a good indication of the freshness. Grasp the tree firmly by the stem midway between the top and the bottom. Lift the tree approximately 16 to 18 inches off the ground and hit the butt end of the stem on hard ground or pavement. If many green-colored needles shatter from the tree, it is a sign of dryness. If only a few green needles are loosened by the fall, the tree is safe to use providing it is given adequate care.

Caring For Your Christmas Tree

To keep your Christmas tree fresh and fire resistant throughout the holiday season, it is important that you give it proper care as soon as you buy it.

- If you must travel a long distance, protect the tree from the drying wind by placing it inside your vehicle. If the tree must be tied on top of the car, first wrap it with cloth or plastic. The wind created by a moving vehicle will cause excessive drying out of the needles.
- As soon as you get the tree home, cut one half inch off the base of the stem and place the tree in a clean pail of warm water. Research has shown that plain tap water is best. Avoid any home recipes or commercial additives. Next place the tree in a cool shaded area protected from wind and sun.
- An additional step to ensure freshness is to spray the tree thoroughly with an anti-transparent or an anti-desiccant material, such as Vapor Guard or Wilt-Pruf, available from most garden centers. Follow the manufacturers recommendations.
- Before bringing the tree indoors, cut off another ½ inch from the base of the stem and place the tree in a stand designed to hold water. Trees can use up to a quart of water each day per inch of stem diameter. A tree with a 4-inch stem diameter will use up to a gallon of water per day. Therefore, check your water level frequently. If the water level falls below the cut end, a crusty sap seal will develop and prevent water absorption. If this happens, remove the tree from the stand and make a new ½ inch cut on the base. An angled cut will require a deeper

water level than a straight cut since the cells that transport water are just under the bark. If a standard Christmas tree stand is not available, place the tree in a pail full of clean sharp sand to which water can be added.

Placing and Decorating the Tree

- Locate the tree so that all exits from the room are kept open.
- Place the tree as far as possible from space heaters, fireplaces, wood stoves, and other heat sources.
- Carefully check cords and connections of the electric lights you will be using. Frayed cords or faulty connections are dangerous.
- Avoid plugging the tree lights into an overloaded circuit.
- Keep metal foil and tinsel out of the tree light sockets.
- Do not allow playing with electrical toys under the tree.
- Keep all package wrapping and other flammable materials away from the tree.
- Never use lighted candles or other open flame on or near the tree.
- Never light the tree unless there is someone there to watch it.

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Balsam Fir



Concolor Fir (White Fir)



Douglas Fir



Fraser Fir



Scotch Pine