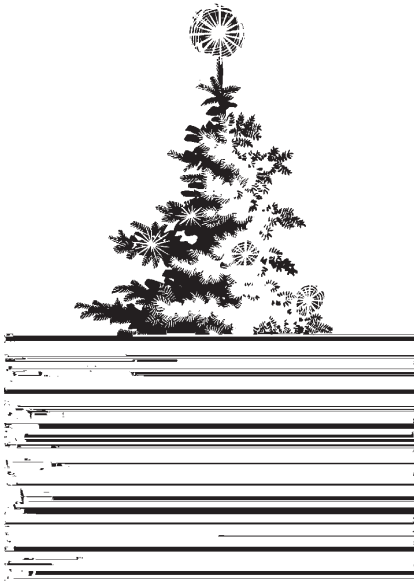


UI Extension Forestry Information Series II

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Fresh Christmas Trees - An Eco-Friendly Choice

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Each year 30-35 million American families celebrate the holiday season with a fresh Christmas tree. There is an on-going and lively debate between folks that prefer live Christmas trees and those other folks that prefer (gasp) fake stuff. In this age of going green and worries about global warming, what better way to

show your commitment to planet earth than to chose a natural, renewable product that supports local farmers, is carbon neutral, organic, biodegradable. and smells good to boot?

Many will spend time in choosing a species and looking for the perfectly shaped tree. But perhaps the most important thing you need to know about your fresh Christmas tree is how to care for it once you get it home.

And when all the carols have been sung and the fudge is gone, go to www.realchristmastrees.org and type in your ZIP code to find a recycling program for your tree near you.

Christmas tree types and characteristics.

There are many species of conifers to choose from when shopping for the perfect Christmas tree.

Pines.

White pine has soft, flexible bluish-green needles. This species has good needle retention, but little aroma and flexible branch that make it not suitable for heavy ornaments.

Scots pine also has soft-flexible needles, but are more bright green in color than white pines. With excellent needle retention and sturdy branches, Scots pine is the most common Christmas tree species sold in the U.S.

Spruce.

White spruce has short, bluish-green, very sharp needles, and a mild scent. With a naturally conical shape and sturdy branches, white spruce excellent for all sorts of ornaments.

Colorado blue spruce also has sharp needles, and can be green to the most beautiful silver-blue in color. Though not very fragrant, this species has a symmetrical form and good needle retention.

Firs.

Fraser fir has dark, blue-green needles and branches that turn slightly upwards at the tips.

This species has good form and needle-retention and like most firs a pleasant scent.

Concolor fir has small, narrow needles that occur in rows. With a pleasing shape and aroma, and good needle retention, concolor fir is a favorite.

Balsam fir has long-lasting, dark-green needles and a pleasing fragrance.

Noble fir - has dark-green upturned needles. A beautiful, long-keeping tree with stiff branches for heavy ornaments.

Grand fir has bright green needles that are held flat on the branches. Though not the best fir for heavy ornaments, it is a long-lasting and very fragrant tree.

Douglas fir.

Douglas-fir (which is not a true fir) has soft, green to dark green needles that radiate in all directions from branch. Doug fir has a sweet fragrance and is one of the most popular Christmas trees species.

Choosing a tree.

Whether from pre-cut and purchased from a lot in town or cut fresh from a local Christmas tree farm, there are a few things to keep in mind when choosing this year's tree. Tips from the National Christmas Tree Association include:

- Know what height and width you need before heading out.
- Do a freshness test: . Green needles on fresh trees break crisply when bent sharply with the fingers. Dry needles come off in your hand. Yellow needles are naturally shed, but if there's a shower of green needles when you move it, it's too dry. Fresh pine needles do not break, unless the tree is very dry.

- Some species have stiffer branches that can hold heavy ornaments; others won't. See the above list for descriptions.
- If you're buying at a tree farm, dress for a day in the country. Saws are usually provided by the farm operator. Check ahead of time. Some farms measure and price their trees individually, others sell them by the foot.
- Check the trunk to be sure that it is sufficiently straight and will fit your tree stand. Pines usually will have some crook in their trunks. In the fall conifers shed their oldest needles as part of their life cycle. Most farms provide shaking or blowing services to clean the tree after cutting. Some operations will also provide netting for easier transportation.

Fresh Christmas Tree Care.

Trees on lots have probably been cut and transported in mid-November and because of this will not last as long as ones fresh cut at your local tree farm. When a Christmas tree is cut, over half of its weight is water, so it should come as no surprise that keeping your tree well-watered is of the utmost importance. Displaying trees in water in a traditional reservoir-type stand is the most effective way of maintaining their freshness and minimizing needle loss problems.

Choose a sturdy stand that is large enough to hold your tree and has a deep reservoir. A general rule of thumb is that your stand should be able to supply one quart of water per inch of you tree's stem diameter. The outer layers of wood on the trunk are the most efficient in taking up water and should not be removed, so avoid whittling down the sides to fit a stand.

When you are ready to bring in the tree, make a fresh cut to remove about a 1/2-inch thick disk of wood from the base of the trunk before putting the tree in the stand. Make the cut perpendicular to the stem axis - no angles or into a v-shapes,

they just makes it difficult to hold the tree in the stand and also reduces the amount of water available to the tree. Drilling a hole in the base of the trunk does not improve water uptake, nor does the temperature of the water you use.

Check the stand daily to make sure that the level of water does not go below the base of the tree - this is the most important thing you can do to ensure the longevity of your tree.. With many stands, there can still be water in the stand even though the base of the tree is no longer submerged in water. Lowering the room temperature will slow the drying process, resulting in less water consumption each day.

Safety first!

- Keep displayed trees away from sources of heat (fireplaces, heaters, heat vents, direct sunlight).
- Use lights that produce low heat, such as miniature lights, and always inspect light sets prior to placing them on the tree. If worn, replace with a new set.

- Do not overload electrical circuits.
- Always turn off the tree lights when leaving the house or when going to bed.
- Monitor the tree for freshness. After Christmas or if the tree is dry, remove it from the house.
- Never burn any part of a Christmas tree in a wood stove or fireplace.

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