

Selecting the Perfect Christmas Tree



THE
CHAMPION
of TREES

As you begin to search for that perfect holiday tree, careful selection for quality and freshness can keep the holidays safe and attractive. A tree purchased from a lot will not be as fresh as one you cut yourself. Commercial trees are cut early in the season and may lose freshness in transportation and storage. Regardless of the tree you choose, be sure it is fresh.

- Needles should be firmly attached and pliable. The cut end of a fresh tree should be sticky with sap. The needles should be quite fragrant (fir and white pine have the strongest scent). If many needles are dry and fall off, the tree is not very fresh and should not be purchased.
- Pines retain their needles the longest, with Scots and red holding their needles longer than white pine. Spruce trees drop their needles the fastest.
- Branches should be full and bushy and strong enough to support ornaments.

COMMON CHRISTMAS TREE SELECTIONS

SPECIES	NEEDLE RETENTION	FRAGRANCE	Comments
Balsam fir (<i>Abies balsamea</i>)	Very good	Excellent	Dark green needles, white stripe underside, full bodied shape, stiff branches
White fir (<i>Abies concolor</i>)	Very good	Very good	Loosely spaced branches shows off ornaments well
Fraser Fir (<i>Abies fraseri</i>)	Very Good	Excellent	Dark green flat needles, strong upturned branches hold ornaments
Red pine (<i>Pinus resinosa</i>)	Very good	Good	Strong bushy branches, 4-6 inch long needles, retains needles longest of pines
White pine (<i>Pinus strobus</i>)	Very good	Very good	Soft, blue/green needles, floppy branches do not support weight of heavy ornaments
Scots pine (<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>)	Excellent	Good	Dark green needles, stiff branches have an open appearance, holds needs longest of pines

Norway spruce (<i>Picea abies</i>)	Good	Good	Conical shape, 1-inch needles, short needle retention
White spruce (<i>Picea glauca</i>)	Poor	Poor	Blue/green , short stiff needles
Colorado spruce (<i>Picea pungens</i>)	Poor	Good	Dark green to blue needles, stiff branches
Douglas-Fir (<i>Psuedotsuga menziesii</i>)	Very good	Excellent	One of best aromas, soft medium/dark green needles, firm branches

PROLONG THE LIFE OF YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE

Maintaining a fresh tree with proper care is probably the best fire prevention, but no matter how well you care for a tree, it is not likely to remain fresh much longer than three weeks.

- Store tree in a bucket of warm water in a cool, wind free area, such as an unheated garage until tree is ready to be brought indoors.
- Prior to placing a tree in a stand, make a fresh cut in the bottom of the trunk to aid in water uptake. Keep the cut end in water at all times. . A tree in a warm dry room will go through water rapidly. Check the water level daily.
- Avoid placing a tree near hot or cold drafts which promotes needle drop.

RECYCLE LEFTOVER HOLIDAY DECORATIONS AND CHRISTMAS TREES

- Winter birds appreciate the cover of a tree, especially if decorated with bird-food ornaments (suet, molded seed, nuts, and berries). Tie it to a stake or post to prevent it rolling away in winter winds.
- Cut up tree branches and use as winter mulch on perennial flowerbeds. Evergreen boughs placed on top of low growing plants provide protection, especially in late winter when freezing and thawing of the soil heaves shallow-rooted perennials out of the ground
- One or more trees (borrow from neighbor) can be fastened to stakes to make temporary windbreaks to shield tender, broadleaf evergreens, such as rhododendrons or young, newly planted evergreen. Plan ahead by securing stakes in the ground before the ground freezes.

LIVE CHRISTMAS TREES

A living Christmas tree is a live tree with its own roots still attached. The purpose is to have the tree for the holiday season then plant it outdoors. The idea has merit, but in order to be successful it does require advance planning. Proper preparation and care of the tree are essential.

- In the fall choose a suitable site in your landscape for the tree.
- Dig the planting hole *in the fall* before the ground freezes. Remove the soil and place it in an area where it will not freeze. Cover the hole and any remaining excavated soil with straw to prevent freezing.

- Select a balled and burlapped tree with a solid root ball. Keep in mind a smaller tree has a better chance of survival, is less expensive, and will be easier to handle.
- Keep the soil ball moist and store in a cool garage, porch, or shed. Place straw or other insulating materials around the soil ball to prevent it from freezing.
- A few days before Christmas bring the balled and burlapped tree indoors, wrap the soil ball in plastic. Place the tree in a cool location; avoid sites near heat sources, such as a fireplace or heat registers
- The shorter the tree's stay indoors, the better its chances of survival when planted outdoors. The maximum stay indoors should be 5 to 7 days. If the tree is kept indoors for a longer period the buds may break dormancy, and dry indoor heat will cause needles to drop.
- Keep the soil ball moist throughout the tree's stay indoors. Check the soil daily and water as needed.
- Shortly after Christmas, remove the tree from the house and place it in a cool location. (Don't place the tree directly outdoors. The sharply colder temperatures outdoors may injure the tree.) A brief stay in a cool garage will allow the tree to gradually become acclimated to cooler temperatures. The soil ball should not be allowed to freeze during this period.
- On a relatively mild winter day, remove the straw from the planting area and plant the tree outdoors. Water well and mulch the area heavily to prevent the soil from freezing immediately.
- Continue to monitor the soil moisture for the rest of the growing season.

Holiday Greens

Evergreen branches used for indoor decorations should be given the same precautions used for a live Christmas tree. If they become too brittle and dry they may be a fire hazard. Proper care will not only make greens safer, but they will remain attractive longer. Avoid placing near a heat source.

- The longest lasting greens are those pruned from the landscape. If purchased, recut the stems and place branches in a bucket of water, storing in the coolest place available until you are ready to bring them indoors.
- Some of the best materials to use as holiday greenery include Douglas fir, yew, holly, boxwood, pine, and juniper. Juniper and holly have the shortest indoor life and needles of hemlock and spruce drop too quickly to be used indoors.