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The Selection and Protection of **Fresh-Cut Christmas Trees**

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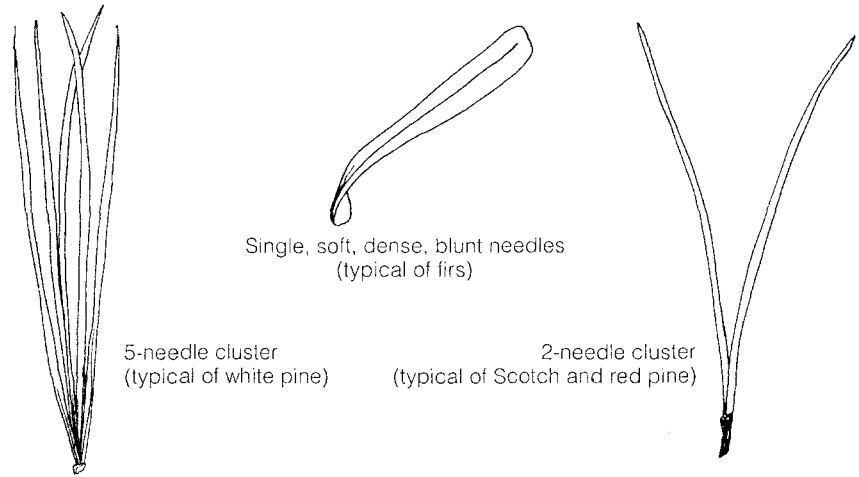
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The use of fresh-cut ever-green trees for the Christmas holidays brings both a pleasure and uniqueness that no artificial tree could ever match. Fresh trees can be obtained from local nurseries, fund raising organizations, general retail outlets or right off the tree farm itself.

When seeking cut trees for use in homes or other interior settings, there are some guidelines that should be considered by the purchaser to get the best buy for the money.

First of all, check the tree species. Commonly, Scotch pine, red (or Norway) pine, balsam fir and Douglas fir will be plentiful on the market. Fraser fir and Noble fir are also available, although not locally grown. Occasionally, white spruce and Colorado blue spruce will be seen on the market, and rarely, white pine will be offered.

Of all the trees, the Fraser and Noble firs will generally have the best appearance because they are usually not oversheared and not discolored from local environments and artificial green retardant sprays. The firs are easily identified by their short, soft and dense needles and their very pleasant fragrance. Pines, both Scotch and red, have longer 2-needle clusters. White pine, rarely used for Christmas trees, is commonly cut up into roping for making wreaths.



The fir trees will have an earlier needle drop than the pines, but not to the extent where use should be discouraged if the other characteristics of the tree are acceptable.

Colorado spruce trees should not be used as fresh-cut specimens indoors because of their needle sharpness, early needle drop and fire hazard potential. White spruce trees are similar in appearance to the Colorado spruce, but with noticeably softer needles.

The freshest trees, of course, are those that the purchaser cuts himself. Therefore, try to purchase trees that have been grown in our locality. Trees from North Dakota, northern South Dakota, eastern Montana and western Minnesota will almost always be fresher than those coming from a greater distance, such as Michigan, Wisconsin or Ohio. The source of the trees is usually known by the nurseryman, and trees are often promoted as to their source.

Tree freshness and form will be greatly enhanced if the trees can be purchased from a source that displays trees standing upright rather than lying down. Generally, brown needles on the interior of the tree do not indicate poor quality. Look for fullness, coloring and good needle holding characteristics on the current and previous season's growth. One other point: select a tree that is a little larger than that needed to provide some greens for extra decoration and to allow for a fresh cut on the stump.

When the ideal tree has been selected, bring it home and make a fresh cut across the stump, either at an angle or in a "V" shape to allow for a greater absorbing surface. Once completed, the tree stump can be placed in a bucket of tepid water or in a solution of ammonium sulfate. Adding the right amount of ammonium sulfate to the water will make wood and needles of the tree more fire resistant.



The procedure to follow using this readily available fertilizer from any seed or feed store is to weigh the tree - using a bathroom scale - and divide the weight in pounds by four. This will give the amount of fertilizer in pounds needed to treat the tree. If the tree weighs 12 pounds, then 3 pounds of ammonium sulfate would be needed. For each pound of fertilizer, 1.5 pints of water would be used to dissolve the material, so the example tree would then require 4.5 pints of water to dissolve the 3 pounds of fertilizer.

Fresh cut trees will absorb this solution or just plain water very quickly; old cut trees will absorb it slowly. Either way, be sure the butt end of the tree is kept in the fertilizer solution or water throughout the holiday season.

To enhance the color and help minimize messiness, spray the tree with a solution of anti-desiccant (40 parts water; 1 part anti-desiccant) an hour or two before putting it up. This will help keep the tree turgid with water longer, reducing the hassle of filling the holder containing the water or solution as often, and will help to minimize the threat of fire hazard.

Christmas Tree Safety

Cutting your own tree

Use a sharp pruning-type saw. Hatchets or axes tend to be more dangerous for inexperienced individuals. Sharp saws produce fewer injuries because they cut better. Keep a guard or shield over the teeth of the saw when being carrying it; a piece of folded cardboard will prevent accidental nicks and damage. Many tree farm operators will provide a saw for your use and some may even cut the tree for you. Cutting a tree with a hatchet leaves a surface that does not readily absorb moisture.

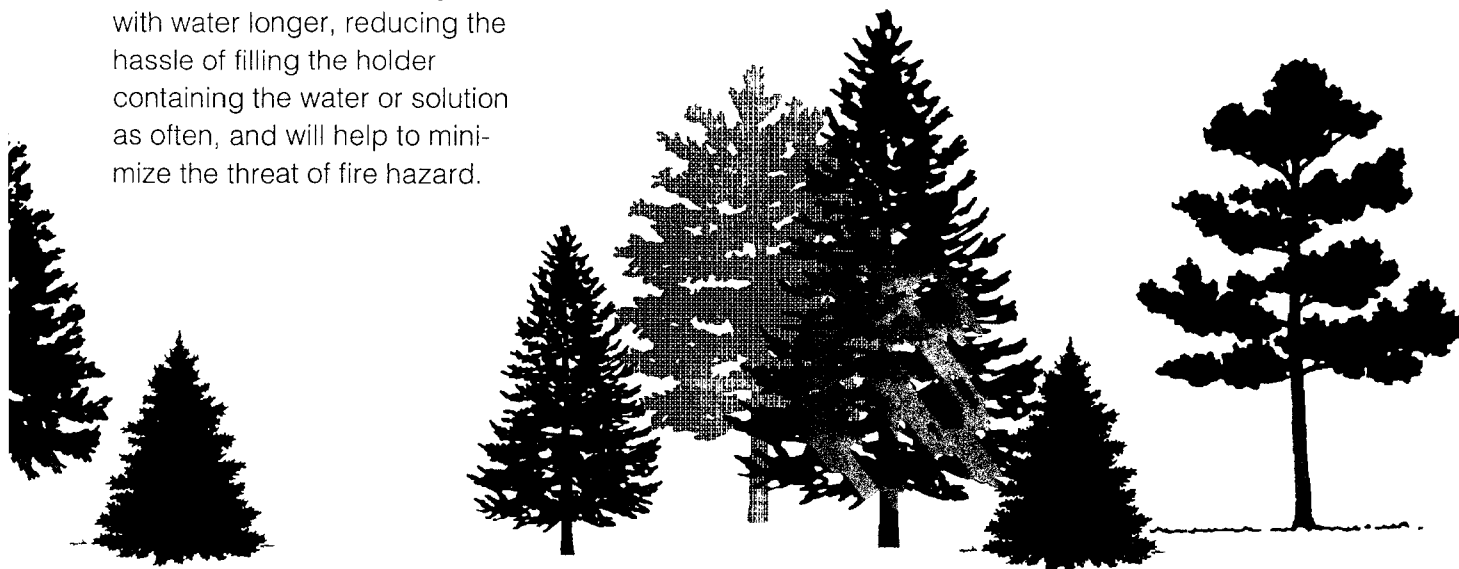
Selecting and cutting your tree at a tree farm is usually a family activity. Most trees available at cut-it-yourself locations are smaller, but when cutting larger trees be careful of where they fall.

Storing the tree

If the tree is not to be decorated right away, store it in a cold environment. An unheated garage or porch is satisfactory. Prolonged cold storage will tend to dry out the tree. It is better to trim the butt end of the trunk and immerse it in water or an ammonium sulfate solution. Maintain the reservoir level daily. If the reservoir should dry up, the end of the trunk will seal, reducing the tree's water intake. This will hasten the drying of the tree, resulting in a greater fire hazard.

Decorating the tree

A step ladder is usually used when decorating taller trees. Set up the ladder on a level base so all four legs carry the weight. Be sure the side braces are fully extended to limit the spread of the ladder. Do not use the top or next to the top



platform as a step. Do not over-extend your reach from the ladder; move the ladder to prevent a fall.

Examine all decorations carefully before placing them on the tree. Every string of lights should be checked. Look for frayed wires, broken insulation, damaged receptacles and clips as well as the Underwriters Laboratory tag of approval. Do not use faulty decorations.

Be sure to correctly use three-prong plugs if light strings are equipped with them. Do not remove or alter the third prong on plug-ends, the grounding it provides may prevent a shock or fire.

Use parallel wired strings of lights rather than those that are series wired. A string of parallel wired lights remains lighted when one or more bulbs are burned out. When one bulb of a series wired string fails, none of the lights work. Fortunately, series wired lights are not as common as they used to be.

Limit the number of light strings to not more than three per extension cord. Arrange

extension cords so that the tree lights can be turned off conveniently without having to crawl under the tree. If there are toddlers in the house, be careful to keep extension cords and connections out of their reach.

Attach light strings so light bulbs do not touch the tree's needles. Heat from the bulbs will hasten the drying process of the tree. A spark from a broken bulb could ignite a tinder-dry needle. Inspect the attachment of the lights throughout the holiday season and adjust as needed to maintain a safe decoration.

Most tinsel used for tree decorating today is of plastic material, reducing the threat of electrical short circuits and sparks. Always place tinsel and other decorations away from light strings for a safer tree.

Other decorative materials such as artificial snow may have hazards to watch for. Some of these materials irritate the lungs if inhaled. Always read and follow directions for safe use. Wear gloves and eye protection when applying materials such as spun glass 'angel hair' that may cause irritation.

Home-made paper decorations are popular, especially in homes with school-age youngsters. Paper decorations should be placed at least 3 inches from lights to reduce the threat of fire.

Be sure to turn off all electrical decorations when leaving the house or going to bed. Left unattended, they may start a fire that won't be detected until it is too late, ruining the holiday season and more.

Never Use Candles

Candles are a popular holiday decoration, but they also cause many serious fires. Candles and trees simply don't mix.



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