

## How to Care for Christmas Trees and Greens



It's that most wonderful time of the year. The intoxicating scent of cut trees and greens fills the air in our homes. Keep your holidays full of fragrance by selecting fresh plant material for inside and outside the home. Fresh also means safe, so read on!

### Christmas Tree Choices

Your Christmas tree choices really depend on where you live and shop. It's safe to say that there are "traditional" trees we look for and buy each year.

Firs are always popular choices for Christmas trees. Balsam, Canaan, Fraser and Noble are a few that make prize-worthy trees for the home. Though called a fir, Douglas fir is among the more popular choices for cut trees. Scotch pine rounds out the list. Here's a closer look at some of the more popular trees and their key characteristics

#### Balsam Fir, *Abies balsamea*

- ❖ long needle retention
- ❖ needles are shiny and dark-green
- ❖ needles are aromatic.



#### Canaan Fir, *Abies balsamea var. phanerolepis*

- ❖ in many ways, like balsam and Fraser firs
- ❖ long needle retention
- ❖ shiny, dark green aromatic needles

#### Fraser Fir, *Abies fraseri*

- ❖ long needle retention
- ❖ uniform in its pyramidal shape
- ❖ flattened, shiny dark green needles
- ❖ stiff horizontal branches



#### Noble Fir, *Abies procera*

- ❖ long needle retention
- ❖ symmetrical, pyramidal shape
- ❖ stiff branches
- ❖ bluish-green needle color



Photos courtesy of  
The National Christmas Tree Association

#### Douglas fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*

- ❖ needles are dark green or bluish-green
- ❖ needles are aromatic
- ❖ open, pyramidal shape



#### Scotch pine, *Pinus sylvestris*

- ❖ long needle retention
- ❖ dark green foliage
- ❖ stiff branches



### Selecting Fresh Trees

A visit to the garden center or Christmas tree lot can be like going to the candy store--so much to choose from it can be hard to decide. Keep in mind, sometimes cut trees appear smaller in the sales yard. Make sure you select the right size tree for its intended use. Trees with stiff branches usually support heavier Christmas ornaments with ease.

#### Here's are some tips on choosing a fresh tree:

- ❖ Hold a branch between your thumb and index finger and rub the needles. Needles that easily fall off indicate a tree that is dry or drying. The needles should stay on the branch.
- ❖ Branches that 'snap off' are not fresh and should be avoided. You should feel flexibility in the branches when flexing them.
- ❖ It is not uncommon to find some brown needles in the interior portions of the tree.
- ❖ Have a fresh cut made before leaving the tree lot.
- ❖ Baled trees are the best way to transport your tree.

### Care of Your Cut Tree

Now that you've selected your tree and brought it home, the most critical thing for its survival is WATER. The cut end should never be allowed to callous over with resin. Be certain to prop the tree up

[continued on next page](#) ►

## How to Care for Christmas Trees and Greens

in a bucket of water in a sheltered location until you are ready to bring it indoors.

Once you are ready to bring the tree in, make a fresh cut to the stump. The tree stand should be large enough to hold the trunk in place. Fill the reservoir with water immediately. Never let the water supply run out; check daily.

### Recycling After the Holidays

Trees should be removed soon after the holidays. But don't throw it out, it does have another life! Cut the boughs from the tree and use as living mulch in bulb and perennial borders after the ground freezes. Small trees can be propped up as a habitat for birds and other small animals over the winter. In coastal areas, trees are used to reduce beach erosion.

### Care of Balled and Burlapped Christmas Trees

Some people choose to make their Christmas tree a permanent part of their landscape. In cold areas, you need to plan ahead for this. **Here are the steps to follow:**

- ❖ Before the ground freezes, dig a hole for the root ball twice the width of the anticipated size.
- ❖ Line the hole and removed soil with straw or mulch to keep it from freezing. Follow the same procedures as mentioned above for selecting a fresh tree.
- ❖ When your tree comes home, keep it in a protected location and do not allow the root ball to dry out. Balled and burlapped trees should not be kept in the home for long periods of time.
- ❖ Outside versus inside temperatures can be extreme. To minimize the shock, limit the amount of time the tree is inside the home. Seven to 10 days would be a safe range for keeping the tree inside.

### Did you know...

- ❖ Nearly 38 million people will enjoy a fresh cut tree this year.
  - ❖ In 1856, President Franklin Pierce was the first president to set up a Christmas tree in the White House.
  - ❖ President Calvin Coolidge established the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on the White House lawn in 1932.
  - ❖ Christmas tree farms provide many environmental benefits by serving as wildlife habitats, helping soil stability,
- ❖ Once outside again, place the tree in a protected area for a week or two before planting it in its permanent location. In extreme locations, consider additional wind/exposure protection.
  - ❖ Be sure to water after planting and apply mulch after the ground is frozen.

### Selecting Cut Greens and Wreaths

The same advice for choosing fresh trees applies to wreaths and greens, specifically:

- ❖ Buy only those that exhibit good needle retention. Cut evergreen material used indoors will last longer if used in cooler locations.
- ❖ Roping will last for many weeks if kept outside in the cold, often damp weather. When used indoors, it can dry out rapidly. Be careful of flammability; roping used near fireplaces dries rapidly and can pose safety problems.
- ❖ Wreaths used indoors will also dry rapidly. It's best to keep in a cooler location indoors if at all possible.
- ❖ The use of an anti-desiccant can be used to reduce drying. Read the label before applying and follow all directions.

continued on next page ►

