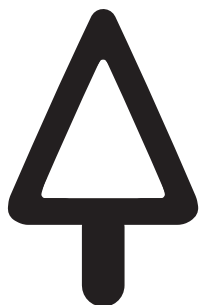
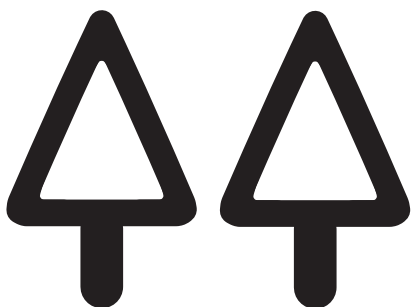
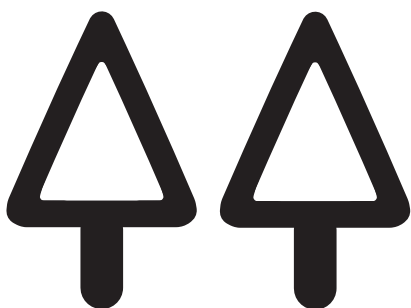
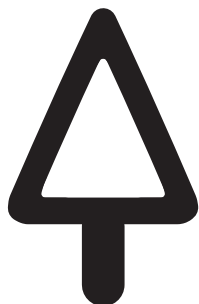


Selecting and Maintaining Your Natural Christmas Tree



Consumers spend about 210 million dollars for approximately 35 million natural Christmas trees sold in the United States each year. For that money, customers want attractive trees that retain their needles and vigor and are relatively safe. The following information includes a number of suggestions and precautions a consumer should consider.

Selecting the tree
Before selecting an individual tree, a consumer should recognize differences among species in needle-holding capacity. In general, spruces drop their needles the quickest. Firs drop them somewhat slower and pines retain their needles the longest time. Scotch and red pines tend to retain their needles somewhat longer than white pine. (Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the popularity of Scotch pine.)

When selecting among individual trees, there are a number of quick, simple tests you can apply to the product:

Color—A healthy green color usually indicates that the tree is fresh. The most notable exception to this rule is Scotch pine, which has a natural yellow tinge. To give the trees more consumer appeal, producers often spray them with a non-toxic green colorant.

Odor—Fresh trees have a fragrant odor.

Butt end—A sticky tree butt indicates freshness. A tree should have a straight butt of at least five to six inches to facilitate placement in the stand.

Needles—The needles on a fresh tree are relatively pliable; those on a tree that has been cut for a considerable amount of time are more brittle and break easily. Bounce the tree butt lightly on the ground. Few, if any, needles will drop from a fresh tree.

Branches—The branches should be strong enough to support lights and decorations without extensive breaking or sagging.

Care of the tree at home
Storing—The tree should not be stored where it is subject to direct sunlight, wind, or heat. All three of these will accelerate drying and needlefall. A suitable storage site is in a cool, moist area protected from the sun and wind, such as a basement or garage. It is also advisable to make two diagonal cuts on the butt end and immediately put the butt in a pail of water if the tree is to be stored for a number of days. Such action will facilitate water uptake and will keep the tree fresh during the storage period.

Putting the tree in the stand—Two diagonal cuts on the butt end approximately one inch above the original cuts, just prior to placing the tree in the stand, will help ensure continued water uptake while the tree is in the house. It is very important to keep the tree stand filled with water—check the water level daily. A tree may use up to one quart of water per day in a warm room.

Nutrient additives—The opinion among experts is mixed regarding the usefulness of adding various nutrients to the water in the tree stand. Some believe that such an addition will prolong the tree's freshness by several days. Other experts believe it may actually aid the drying process by promoting the growth of bacteria or fungi that clog the water-uptake vessels in the tree. Experimental evidence for either viewpoint is scanty; therefore, keeping the tree well-watered as described above still appears to be the best way to keep the tree fresh.

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Location—The tree should be located away from warm air vents, fireplaces, radiators, television sets, or other heat sources.

Fire protection—The most effective fire preventives are to buy a freshly-cut tree and keep it well supplied with fresh water. In addition, locate the tree away from sources of heat that will increase drying of the tree.

The longer the tree remains in the house, the more flammable it becomes. A fresh tree should not remain in the home longer than three weeks.

In the past, it has been recommended that trees be sprayed with borax and boric acid or sodium silicate solutions to act as fire retardants. Neither of these has proven effective for this purpose.

Disposal of the tree
Disposing of a used Christmas tree often is a serious problem. Several suggestions are offered:

- Place the tree in the yard as a bird haven during the remaining winter months.
- Burn the branches in small pieces in your fireplace. They will give a pleasant aroma.
- Chop up the tree and use as a mulch.

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Prepared by Paul Wray, extension forester.

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