

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



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Selection and Care of Live Christmas Trees

Norway Spruce
(*Picea Abies*)



Living trees, although usually much smaller than cut trees and slightly more expensive, may offer a real value. They can become beautifying additions to your landscape and attractive habitats to wildlife. There can also be a certain amount of joy associated with watching them grow. In the future, when it gets larger, it could be recycled and used again as a cut tree.

If you decide on a living tree, what are your choices? The most common trees available are sold through traditional garden center and nursery outlets. The retailer is proficient at handling the living plants and can assist you with instructions for planting and after-care. However, the selection will still come down to a choice between the most common trees suitable to the local environment. These include Douglas Fir, Norway and Blue Spruce, and Scotch Pine. Occasionally, white fir, white spruce and white pine are seen balled and burlapped or in retail garden centers for sale at Christmas.

To be successful with a living tree, you must rethink this seasonal entity. A tree taken in from the outside during the early winter loses its hardiness (ability to tolerate the winter environment) if left inside too long. When it is returned to the outside, it could be injured by the cold winter weather. To prevent this, keep the tree in as cool a location as possible for as long as practical before bringing it into the home. Keep the temperature inside as low as possible during the tree's stay and keep that stay from 7 to 10 days at the most.

After purchasing this plant, but before the ground freezes, dig a hole large enough to accommodate the root ball. Remove the soil from the hole and put it in a location where it will not freeze, such as the garage or cellar. Fill the hole with leaves or other material that will prevent it from freezing as the soil temperature drops. This way, after the tree has been used, it can be planted outside, backfilled with soil, and watered in.

The tree will probably survive with only a few additional waterings throughout the winter. Mulch the tree with leaves or an organic mulch after planting to help retain moisture.

If you choose not to plant your Christmas tree until spring, it should be stored in an unheated area (garage or breezeway) and kept moist throughout the winter. A tree could be kept like this for planting during a winter thaw or until spring, but the risks of it drying are greater.

In these times of inflation, living trees are a welcome addition to the holiday scene because they can be recycled and provide continued enjoyment.

Care of Cut Trees

Enjoy your Christmas tree this year by taking a few simple steps towards a safer holiday. The fresher you keep your tree, the safer it is, because the foliage can not ignite when it's green and fresh. If the tree loses as much as one-fifth of its normal moisture, it becomes ignitable.

Don't be misled by the color of a tree when selecting it from a lot. It may have been sprayed with a colorant. The best indication of freshness is how flexible the branches and needles are. Test to see if the needles fall easily, and look for resin at the butt. If the needles remain on and the butt end is sticky, chances are you have a fresh tree.

Once the tree is picked out, take it home and cut one inch off the butt to increase water absorption. Stand the tree in a bucket of water, and keep it in a cool room, garage or protected spots outdoors.

Bring the tree in when you are ready to trim it, and keep it in a sturdy holder with adequate water at the base. Never let the water supply run out.

When placing your tree indoors, be sure to keep it away from heat sources such as a radiator or fireplace. Be sure all your lights and connections are safe to use - check them every year before and after holiday use. Unplug lights before retiring or going out.

If you use an artificial tree, select one that is flame retardant, and be sure to follow the same precautions described for real trees.

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