

## Choosing Cut Christmas Trees

To many, Christmas just isn't Christmas without a real Christmas tree. Whether a perfect specimen or a Charlie Brown tree, the scent embodies the spirit of the season.

Buying a fresh Christmas tree can be expensive, but if you remember a few basic pointers, your tree will be long lasting and your money well spent.

Choose a fresh tree. The needles of the tree should be flexible and dark green. If needles are discolored or easily broken, the tree has been cut too long. Look for green paint on the tree. Some growers cut their trees as early as October, then paint them to improve the color. Gently grasp a branch and pull slowly along its length. If needles pop off easily, the tree is dehydrated. Raise the tree about a foot off the ground and drop it squarely. It is normal for evergreens to shed some brown needles from the interior of the tree. But very few green needles should drop.

Size matters. If you've just got to have a tree that doesn't fit into your old tree stand, buy a larger stand. Likewise, make sure that the tree will fit in a space well away from fireplaces, heat vents, and doorways.

Water. At home, make a fresh cut about one inch above the old base. This removes wood that cannot readily absorb water. Place the tree in a stand with a large reservoir of water. Depending upon size, species, and location, the tree may absorb a gallon of water in the first day, so check it frequently and water as needed. As long as the tree absorbs water, it is reasonably fire-resistant. Fresh, well-watered Christmas trees do not represent a fire hazard. Trees that are dried out do. In public buildings it is advisable to spray the trees with fire retardant.

Recycle. After Christmas, the tree is a source of organic riches. It can be placed outside, adorned with bread and suet, and used as a bird feeder. It can be chipped for mulch or burned for fuel. Fish and Game has found that Christmas trees, properly weighted down, provide good habitat for fish. Some communities collect and chip Christmas trees, then sell the chips or use them in city landscaping.

*~~Gerry Bates is a Community Forestry Assistant for Three Rivers RC&D Council.*