

## Christmas Tree Selection and Care

This season when you are out shopping for your Christmas tree, there are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Shop for a tree that appears to be well cared for, and from a lot that has the trees displayed in the shade.
2. Look for a tree with a full and a typical 'Christmas tree' shape and one that has a bright-green color, not yellow or dull or dry looking.
3. Check the trunk to make sure it is straight.
4. Check for any bare spots or missing limbs. A full tree is important if it is viewed from all sides. Otherwise, placing it next to a wall or corner of a room can hide a section of the tree that has fewer needles.
5. Check the height of the tree, and add that to the height of your tree stand. Then compare that to the height of your ceiling.
6. When buying a pre-cut tree test the needles. Needles on a fresh tree will bend not break.

The types of Christmas trees, usually found in the Rio Grande Valley are:

- **Plantation Douglas Fir.** The most popular of all firs, it is a soft needled, lush green tree. The tree is trimmed to have the conical "Christmas tree" shape.
- **Grand Fir.** Resembles the plantation Douglas fir, yet is unique. It has flat needles projecting from either side of the branch that are two toned in color. On the topside the needle is waxy and deep green, while on the underside it is silvery-blue.
- **Fraiser Fir.** A true fir with needles 3/4 to 1/2 inches long. The tree has an upswept form, slightly open in texture, and a layered look.
- **Noble Fir.** The finest of all Christmas trees. This majestic true fir, like the Fraiser Fir, has an upswept naturally layered growth habit. Its beauty is reflected in its silver blue color and its ability to retain needles. This long lasting tree is rapidly becoming one of the most popular Christmas trees in the Southwest. Noble Firs command a high retail price.
- **Scotch Pine.** The hardiest of all Christmas trees. This tree is a semi to long needled tree and is sheared to a conical "Christmas tree" shape. The needles are sharp and hard to the touch. The tree is normally sprayed with green dye, which helps retain its color.

Most of the Valley nurseries and garden centers will have Christmas trees for sale from right after Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve.

Once you have found the perfect tree, you'll want to keep it in tip-top shape. Follow these suggestions to ensure freshness throughout the holidays.

**1.** On arriving home, make a fresh cut removing the base of the trunk at least one-half inch above the original cut. This fresh cut is important, as it will remove all the sap that has sealed the tree, and will allow the tree to take up water, thus keeping it alive and fresh. **A dried out tree is a major fire hazard.** Immediately, after making the fresh cut, put the tree in a stand and be sure the tree is well secured.

**2.** A stand for your Christmas tree should be sturdy, made of heavy-duty plastic or painted metal, and one that holds at least one gallon of water. Clean the stand in advance with a cup of bleach mixed with a cup of warm water. Scrub the stand, then rinse it with clean, warm water. This will eliminate micro-organisms that can block the absorption of water by the tree.

**3.** Adjust it for balance, then fill the stand with clean water to cover the fresh cut. Refill daily or as needed. There is no need to put sugars or chemicals into the water to help preserve the tree, as they usually don't. All you need is regular refills of clean fresh water.

**4.** Place the tree away from heat sources such as heaters, stoves, heating vents or fireplaces. Here in the Valley with our warm winters, place the tree away from air conditioning vents as A/C air can dry out your tree.

**5.** When decorating the tree, use miniature lights that produce less heat and, therefore, reduce drying. Be sure to check for frayed or cracked cords, and broken sockets and plugs before putting the lights on the tree.

(Information source: Texas Department of Agriculture.)

Article written by the Cameron County Horticulture Education Committee.

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