

## Christmas Trees and Décor

For those celebrating Christmas, selecting a tree and properly caring for it is an important process. As with landscape plants, there is only so much that can be done with an already declining tree. By selecting a healthy tree, and caring for it properly, you can extend the life and enjoyment that a Christmas tree, and other greenery, brings to your home.

When purchasing a cut tree, there are important signs to look for. Dull needles that are more gray than bright green or needles that are stiff and brittle indicate the tree's decline. When you remove needles from the tree they should ooze. An oozing needle is full of moisture and life.

Once your tree is home, immediately place it in warm water in a cool spot in the house. Fireplaces, stoves, heat ducts and television sets should be as far from your tree as possible. Regularly add water to the reservoir and recut the tree if the water line ever dips below the bottom of the trunk. Aspirin, pennies, soda, sugar or bleach in the tree water does not extend the life of the tree.

If needles are rapidly shedding from your tree, recut the trunk about an inch above the original cut. This may open up clogged, water-conducting tissues. Keep in mind that real trees are a messy affair and some needle drop will always occur.

If you trim branches from your live tree, look for ways to use them in other areas of your home. Evergreen branches can be woven into a wreath, added to a table setting or tied in small bunches for banisters or as an accent to the mistletoe hanging above doorways. As with the tree itself, keep the greenery in water until you're ready to use it. Greenery allowed to dry can become extremely flammable and should be kept away from candles and lights. Also keep your eyes open for natural accents you may have in your yard. Pinecones, berries, dried leaves, brightly colored twigs, or dried flower heads can all bring a touch of the outdoors to your holiday designs. Large bows help to hide branch ends and wire while also adding an accent color to the decorations.

For those who'd like to use a live tree (with roots) and plant it after Christmas, it's best to bring the tree inside only a few days before to avoid triggering a break in dormancy. Some nursery's will allow you to purchase the tree ahead of time but arrange to pick it up at a later date. Immediately after Christmas, the tree should be inside no more than 3 days, move the tree to the garage to re-acclimate it to the cold weather. Digging the hole before the ground is frozen (sometimes well before Christmas) is a good idea. If you dig your hole ahead of time, backfill the hole with the same soil with mulch on top to keep the soil from freezing. Once you plant the tree, water it well and re-mulch to prevent the water from freezing before the tree can absorb it.

If fake trees are your interest, care is much easier. Don't worry about watering or trimming, although needle drop will still occur. Every year the debate pops up about which type of tree (fake or real) is more environmentally friendly. Although cutting down a tree doesn't sound like the green choice, it is. Fake trees last an average of six years in your home but they persist in landfills for centuries. Real trees have a positive impact on their environment prior to harvest. These trees provide habitat for animals, remove dust and pollen from the air and provide oxygen. After harvest, real trees continue to be the green choice. In the United States 93% of real trees are recycled in some manner, according to the University of Illinois. This recycling can provide fish habitats, prevent erosion and can be used to rebuild housing structures for wildlife.

Each tree type has its own virtues and drawbacks with the same sentiments. Real, fake or balled and burlaped, the most important part of any tree is the people around it.

