

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



Taking Care When Using Fresh Christmas Trees

November 26, 2022

The best reason for having a fresh Christmas tree indoors is the fragrance filling the air from the tree. This wonderful aroma adds to the holiday cheer and triggers many wonderful memories. Balled and burlapped and fresh-cut Christmas trees are available locally. Before purchasing a fresh tree, consider your expectation of how long it should last safely inside your home and your ability to care for it. Properly preparing your balled and burlapped or fresh-cut tree for display indoors provides enjoyment and keeps it safe.

A benefit of a live balled and burlapped tree is planting it in the yard after Christmas. Buy a healthy tree that you can handle by the heavy soil and root ball. Another important point is to protect the tree by covering it or placing it inside a covered vehicle when bringing it home.

After purchasing the tree, keep it outside in a protected, cool location. Gradually move the balled and burlapped tree indoors. First, take it into a garage or unheated room for a day or two before bringing it into the house. Before entering the house, place the tree inside a large, plastic tub to keep floors or rugs clean and dry. Remember that seven to ten days is the limit for keeping balled and burlapped trees indoors.

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Place the tree out of direct sunlight and away from heat that may injure the tree. Use miniature lights for decorating since big lights are heavier and much hotter.

Remember to water the tree enough to keep the root ball from becoming dry and causing the tree to die. However, too much water, combined with indoor warm temperatures, may encourage new growth. The new growth could be damaged by cold temperatures when it is moved back outside.

After seven to ten days indoors, move the tree back to the garage or unheated room to allow it to adjust to colder temperatures for several days. If the tree is moved outside right away, it will be sensitive to cold temperatures and may be injured.

Dig a planting hole two and a half times wider than the soil ball and as deep as the depth of the soil ball. Place the tree in the hole, add some soil, and then add water. Continue to fill in the hole and water again. More information on planting a balled and burlapped tree is available at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ho/ho91/ho91.pdf>. Mulch the roots with 2 to 2.5 inches of hardwood bark or pine needles. Continue to check soil moisture during the winter; water when needed.

When choosing a fresh-cut tree to buy, take a handful of needles and carefully bend them back. Needles on a fresh tree should be flexible. If they snap and break easily, select another tree. Keep in mind that any needle will break if bent too far.

The tree should be green or the typical color for that species. Expect a few older, yellow needles from the inside of the tree to fall. If the tree produces a shower of green needles after gently bouncing it on the ground, the tree is too dry.

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When transporting your fresh-cut Christmas tree, protect it by covering with burlap or a large piece of unwanted fabric, tie the tree with twine and place it in a sleeve of plastic netting, or put it inside a covered part of the vehicle. Wind dries out the needles, reducing the time it can remain safely inside your home.

When home, cut 1 to 2 inches off the bottom of the tree trunk. Place it in a bucket of warm water to allow water uptake. Keep the tree in a cool garage or shed out of the sun and wind until you are ready to decorate.

Before bringing the tree inside, cut off another 1 to 2 inches from the bottom of the trunk to improve water uptake. Place the trunk in a sturdy, water-holding stand with widespread legs.

Avoid blocking exit pathways. Keep it away from heat sources.

Filling the reservoir of the tree stand with clear water, according to recent scientific studies, is best. The recommendation at one time included bleach and sugar or corn syrup, but this is no longer recommended since they do not benefit the tree. The most important point is to keep water available to the tree. A one-gallon capacity tree stand makes it easier to keep the tree watered. Check the tree stand reservoir daily. A fresh tree can easily take up a gallon or more of water each day, especially during the first week inside.

Remove the tree when it becomes dry, brittle, or when needles begin to fall. A tree may last two to three weeks inside the home. A dry tree is a fire hazard. It is better to be safe than sorry.

For more information about caring for your balled and burlapped or fresh-cut Christmas tree, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

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To locate a site to cut your own Christmas tree, visit The Kentucky Christmas Tree Association's website at <http://www.kychristmastreefarms.com>. Go to Member Farms and then Find-A-Farm.

Upcoming Event:

Commercial pesticide applicator CEUs will be offered in person at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office on November 29 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. One specific credit and 3 general credits will be awarded. Call 270-685-8480 to register, or for more information. Also, check the Kentucky Department of Agriculture website, https://www.kyagr.com/consumer/documents/ES_TEST_AGR_CEUSchedule.pdf for more details.

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