

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



Proper Selection and Care of Fresh Christmas Trees

November 18, 2023

The fragrance of a fresh Christmas tree brings back many happy memories of family and friends visiting and commenting on how beautifully my mother decorated the tree my father harvested from the farm. Fresh-cut and balled and burlapped Christmas trees are available locally. Before purchasing a fresh tree, consider your expectation of how long it should last safely inside the home and your ability to care for it. Properly preparing the fresh-cut or balled and burlapped tree for display indoors helps keep it safe.

When transporting the fresh Christmas tree home, protect it by covering with burlap or a large piece of unwanted fabric 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. A fresh-cut tree can be tied with twine and placed in a sleeve of plastic netting. This is usually not done with a balled and burlapped tree.

When choosing a fresh-cut tree to buy, conduct a pull test. Gently, grab a branch and pull your hand across the needles firmly. The needles should stay attached to the branch. Gently bounce the tree on the ground. If the tree produces a shower of green needles, the tree is too dry.

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Expect a few older, yellow needles from the inside of the tree to fall. Also, the tree should be green or the typical color for that species.

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

Before bringing the tree inside, cut off another 1 to 2 inches from the bottom of the trunk to improve water uptake. Make the cut straight across the trunk for best results. Place the trunk in a sturdy, water-holding stand with widespread legs, big enough to fit the trunk.

Place the tree in the house where room exits and major pathways are not blocked. Keep it away from heat sources and direct sunlight to prevent drying out.

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. A tree can take up 1 quart of water per inch of diameter of the trunk. So, a four-inch diameter trunk can take up a gallon or more of water a day, especially during the first week inside. Check the tree stand reservoir daily and make sure the trunk is in the water.

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.

The benefit of a live balled and burlapped tree is planting it in the yard after Christmas. Purchase a healthy tree that is handleable by the heavy soil and root ball.

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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.

Place the tree out of direct sunlight and away from heat sources such as stoves, radiators, heat vents, and fireplaces. Heat 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 wilt and 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.

Then plant the tree. 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 planting 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.

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

Annette's Tip:

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.

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