



Christmas Tree Selection & Care:

A highlight of the Christmas season is choosing the family Christmas tree. Ulster County offers a wide variety of options for people— from a growing number of places to cut your own to the many places offering live balled and pre-cut trees.

No matter what type of tree you choose keep this fact in mind: When a Christmas tree is cut over half its weight is water, so be sure when you get it home to keep it well watered.

Caring for pre-cut or you-cut tree:

- When selecting a tree, look for one that is green. The needles of pines and spruces should bend, not break and it should be hard to pull off the branches. On fir species, a needle pulled from a fresh tree will snap when bent, much like a fresh carrot. Also, look for a trunk sticky with sap.
- Make sure that the "handle" at the bottom is long enough to allow the trunk to fit into your tree stand; otherwise, you may need to remove large branches near the base, which can ruin the trees' appearance.
- Make a fresh cut least one inch from the bottom of the trunk if your tree has been cut for more than an hour, and place it immediately into plain water. If you are not going to take the tree inside until later, store the tree out of the wind and sun in an unheated sheltered area such as a garage or porch. Do not expose the tree to freezing temperatures at any time.
- Once inside put the tree in a **sturdy** stand. As a general rule, stands should provide 1 quart of water per inch of stem diameter. A fresh tree may use more than a gallon of water a day.
- Make certain the container has sufficient capacity to keep the trunk in water all the time. Devices are available that help maintain a constant water level in the stand. Adding water-holding gels to the stand is not beneficial because they can reduce the amount of water in the stand that is available to the tree. Do not use additives in the water, including floral preservatives, commercial tree preservatives, molasses, sugar, bleach, soft drinks, aspirin, honey, and other concoctions. Clean water is all that is needed to maintain freshness. Some flame retardants can damage needles and actually increase the rate of moisture loss from trees.
- Keep displayed trees away from sources of heat (fireplaces, heaters, heat vents, direct sunlight). Lowering the room temperature will slow the drying process, resulting in less water consumption each day.
- Only use indoor lights indoors (and outdoor lights only outdoors). Look for the UL label. Check lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Replace or repair any damaged light sets. Use no more than three light sets on any one extension cord. Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards, but do not run cords under rugs. Turn off all lights on trees and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.

Caring for a "live" tree, one that has a rootball:

- Before you take the tree in the house, dig a hole for the tree where you expect to plant it after the holidays. Put the soil in a wheelbarrow and park it in the garage. You'll need loose soil to back fill the hole, and the soil outdoors might be frozen after the holidays.
- Keep your live tree in the house for as short a time as is possible. Keep the ball moist while in the house, but not in a tub full of water. You don't want the ball to dry out completely, but by the same token it shouldn't be soggy all the time either. You can wet it thoroughly, but then don't water again until the ball begins to dry out.
- After Christmas move the tree outdoors as soon as possible and plant it immediately. If the tree can not be planted leave it outside and pack bags of leaves or bales of straw around the ball. The root ball should be exposed to a minimal amount of sun and wind.

Christmas Tree Safety Tips

- Always use the proper step stool or ladder to reach high places.
- Read labels before you use materials that comes in jars, cans and spray cans.
- **Never** place lighted candles on a tree!
- Do not hang popcorn chains and candy canes on the tree when small children are present. They may think that other tree ornaments are also edible.
- Monitor the tree for freshness.

After Christmas or if the tree is dry, remove it from the house, but **don't throw it away**....it still has many uses. Create a Winter Bird Feeder by placing the Christmas tree in the garden or back yard and trim with orange slices, bread, cranberries, bird seed and suet. Trim off the lower branches so they don't provide a hiding place for cats or other predators. I like to use it as garden mulch. The branches can be removed and used as winter protection in the garden. The trunk can be chopped or chipped. Sunk into fish ponds, trees make excellent refuge and feeding areas. To recycle your tree, go to www.realchristmastrees.org and type in your zip code to find a recycling program near you or check your newspaper to see if your community offers Christmas tree recycling. As tempting as it may seem, **never** burn any part of a Christmas tree in a wood stove or fireplace.

Information obtained from the National Safety Council, the Christmas Tree Association and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

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