



Tips for Choosing the Perfect Christmas Tree (& Keeping it Perfect All Season Long)

By Marie Woodward, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

With the holiday season upon us, family and friends gather for good meals, companionship and other festive holiday venues. For many families, it's also time to share that holiday tradition of seeking, choosing and purchasing the perfect Christmas tree. Nothing symbolizes the start of the holiday season better than seeing vehicles of all kinds carrying home their prized Christmas trees.

Whether artificial, precut, fresh cut or living, there's a type of tree for every taste. But is there one variety of tree that stands out as the perfect Christmas tree? Kathy Kogut, president of the 235 member CT Tree Farmers Association, who's members sell on average 150,000 holiday trees every year, says each variety of evergreen has its particular strengths.



Christmas trees at Morse farm. Photo by dmp2021.

For that long Christmas tree fragrance, for example, the balsam fir is a popular choice. Douglas fir has light green and soft needles and is a good choice for the budget minded, but not a good choice for heavy ornaments. White pine has dense soft needles and is a good choice for those with tree allergies. Spruce trees are not as popular due to their poor needle retention. Blue spruce has the best needle retention of all spruce trees, but its stiff needles come with an ouch factor.

Before purchasing a tree, Kogut recommends measuring the space where you plan to place your tree and taking those measurements to the tree farm along with a tape measure. This will help you avoid a common mistake, buying too big a tree. When choosing your tree, inspect all sides so the best side is displayed and make sure the base of the tree allows for 6-8 inches to fit into the stand.

Once home, before bringing your tree into the house, make a fresh cut one inch above the butt end, and place the tree in a stand that can hold at least one gallon of water. A good rule of thumb is to make sure your tree stand can hold one quart of water for each inch in diameter of trunk.

Inside the house, make sure you choose a location for the tree away from heat sources like TV's, fireplaces, radiators and air ducts. Maintain the water level above the tree base at all times. The tree will take up at least one quart of water a day, so checking for water daily is important to keep the tree fresh. No additives are needed. Plain water is completely adequate.

Kogut suggests that if you decide to purchase a precut tree from an urban lot, the same advice applies to measuring, and cutting before placing it in the tree stand. However, buyers should be aware that those trees may have been cut down weeks earlier, come from out of state and may have been. exposed to drying winds in transit. This may shorten the trees' freshness and result in premature dropping of needles.

Living trees, though beautiful, are, Kogut says, not good choices as a Christmas tree. But, if you decide to use a living tree, don't leave it in the house for more than a few days. Otherwise the warmth of the house could bring on new tender growth, which might kill the tree when brought outside to the harsh winter environment after the holidays.



Balled & burlapped tree for planting after the holidays. Photo by dmp, 2019

Lastly, consider recycling your Christmas tree. Many transfer stations will take the tree at no charge and turn them into chips. Or, consider placing your tree in the backyard and place suet and peanut butter covered pine cones, or bread in it for birds.

To learn more about Christmas trees, (<https://ctchristmastree.org/>) or contact UConn Home and Garden Education Center, (<http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu/>).