

Living Christmas Trees

So you think you might want a live Christmas tree this year? Here are a few things you need to know to keep the tree healthy.

Live trees can be kept in their original containers. You will want to do this for at least the first Christmas, so that you do not add the stress of transplanting the tree to the stress of being indoors. Most living trees used for Christmas trees are fast growing, so they should not be left in containers for more than two years.

Keep the tree indoors for no longer than ten days. It should not be located near fireplaces, woodstoves, heating vents, or sunny windows. Prolonged exposure to warm household temperatures will force new growth on the tree; this growth would be apt to freeze when the tree is transplanted outdoors after the holidays.

Water the tree regularly. Line the container in which you place the tree with plastic, waterproof paper or foil to keep excess water from dripping onto your floor or carpet. One easy way to water is to dump two trays of ice cubes onto the soil surface every day. As the ice melts, the cool water trickles through the soil to the roots.

Decorate the tree with small, cool light bulbs. Do not use flocking or artificial snow.

After Christmas, move the tree gradually back outdoors. Keep it in a cool but non-freezing location (such as a shed, garage or barn) for three to four days to gradually acclimate it to cooler temperatures.

Many varieties of trees are suitable for use during the holiday season. The most popular is the Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*). Others found in our Northwest area are the Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), deodar cedar (*Cedrus deodara*), alpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*), Korean fir (*Abies koreana*), and white fir (*Abies concolor*). It should be noted that the grand and noble firs often don't do well when transplanted from the field to a pot.

If you intend to plant the tree in your yard after the holidays, be sure that you are aware of how wide and tall the mature tree grows. Prepare a spot for the tree as soon as you bring it home. If you live in a cold area, dig the planting hole before the ground freezes.

Don't plant the tree too deep. Dig the hole as deep as the root ball, but three or four times as wide. One way to help your tree to transplant better is to take the soil from the hole and store it in your garage or barn to keep it warm. Line the hole with straw to keep the soil from collapsing.

As stated above, you must gradually acclimate your tree to cooler temperatures after being in your home for no more than ten days. Store it in your garage or barn, being sure to water it daily. When it is time to transfer the tree outdoors, remove the burlap and plant the tree so that the warmed soil (from the garage or barn, remember?) comes to the bottom of the trunk. Water thoroughly with lukewarm water. Cover the planting area with a thick layer of mulch, but don't let the mulch rest against the trunk. Finally, it is a good idea to spray the tree with an antidesiccant after planting.

References

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