

TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF HAVING A REAL CHRISTMAS TREE

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The scent of a real Christmas tree in the house, the allure of a family outing to select a real tree and the appeal of buying local are among the reasons people buy real Christmas trees. For some, especially people who grew up in households with an artificial tree, buying and setting up a real tree may seem like a daunting task. With a little planning, however, having a real tree can add a fun and enjoyable family experience to the holidays.

Where to put your tree

Before buying your tree, decide where in your home you are going to display the tree. Keep the tree away from direct heat sources such as fireplaces or furnace vents because these may cause the tree to use more water and dry faster. Double-check that there is adequate floor space for the height of tree you want to display. The taper (ratio of tree width to height) of real trees varies, but is usually around two to three. This means you need a 4-foot wide floor space for a 6-foot tall tree.

Real Christmas tree options: Pre-cut versus choose-and-cut

Consumers can buy trees already cut at a tree lot or they can cut their own at a choose-and-cut farm. Common options for buying pre-cut trees include big box stores and supermarkets, garden centers and freestanding tree lots. Pre-cut trees at box stores or supermarkets offer the convenience of buying trees while doing other shopping. Buying at garden centers or stand-alone tree lots supports local businesses or, in some cases, charitable groups such as scout troops or churches.

Pre-cut trees are usually grown on large farms that specialize in wholesale production, are harvested and then shipped to retail outlets. Choose-and-cut farms are usually smaller tree farms where consumers can wander fields, find their tree and cut the tree with saws provided by the farm. Many choose-and-cut farms also provide family-themed agri-tainment, such as hay wagon rides, petting zoos, bonfires, gift shops and hot chocolate or cider stands.



Some good choices for live Christmas trees include (left to right): Blue spruce, Douglas fir, Scots pine, and Fraser fir. For more information, see: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/choosing_the_right_christmas_tree.

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE - CONTINUED

Fresh tree, Fresh cut, Fresh water

Keeping your real tree hydrated is critical to making sure it does not drop needles and to keep it from becoming a fire hazard. This means following three simple steps:

Fresh tree. If you cut your own tree at a choose-and-cut farm, you know the tree is fresh. If you can't put the tree up in your house right away, store in a garage or other unheated space with the cut end in a bucket of water until you are ready to display it in your house. For pre-cut trees, do the 'pull test'. Gently pull on the end of the branch with your thumb and forefinger. Fresh trees should hold onto all their needles. If a tree loses needles when you do the pull test, keep looking.

Fresh cut. Before setting up your tree in a display stand, cut off a half-inch to an inch off the base of the tree. This will enable the tree to take up water more readily once it is in the stand.

Fresh water. A fresh tree will use up a lot of water, especially in the first week it is in the house. A good rule of thumb is to choose a stand that will hold a quart of water for each inch of diameter of the bottom of trunk of the tree. Most 6'-7' trees have a trunk diameter of 3"-4" so choose a stand that will hold 3 quarts to a gallon of water. Check the stand daily and re-fill to replace water that the tree has taken up. Fresh water and plenty of it is best; research has shown that additives such as aspirin, bleach, soda pop, or floral preservatives do not provide any benefit and can even reduce needle retention.

Take-down tips

Use a turkey baster or a large sponge to transfer any water remaining in the tree stand to a bucket or plastic container. To reduce the amount of needles lost while taking the tree out, lay a bedsheet on the floor and gently lay the tree down on it. Wrap the sheet around the tree to collect any loose needles they may come off while taking the tree out of the house.

Recycling: The last step

Recycle your tree at the end of the holidays and don't let it end up in a landfill. Some communities have curbside tree pick-up for recycling and many others have central drop-off points. Check your local paper or community websites for recycling options in your area.



Some more good choices for live Christmas trees include (left to right): Balsam fir, Black hills spruce, Concolor fir, and White pine. For more information, see: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/choosing_the_right_christmas_tree.