

OHIO AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION  
Wooster, Ohio

December 15, 1956

Forestry Mimeograph No. 31

Consumer Preference in Scotch Pine as a Christmas Tree  
by  
John HacsKaylo



In order to obtain information on the factors which influence the consumer when buying a Christmas tree, an experimental block of 196 Scotch pine (Riga strain) trees were marketed during the 1955 Christmas season.

The trees ranged from 5 to 10 feet in height, and were divided into five classes based upon shearings, which are as follows: (1) unsheared; (2) sheared only once during the third growing season; (3) sheared twice, once in the third and fourth growing season; (4) sheared twice, once in the third and fifth growing seasons; and (5) sheared three times, once in the third, fourth, and fifth growing seasons (Fig. 1).

The trees were marketed on the stump at below prevailing market prices to reduce as much as possible any influencing factors on the selection by the consumer. The trees were sold on a "first come first serve" basis.

A questionnaire was sent out to each buyer on December 29, 1955 to find out how he evaluated the tree he purchased and what an ideal tree should be from the standpoint of form, density, color, straightness of main stem, height, and width of crown. Seventy-five per cent of the questionnaires that were sent out were returned and used in our evaluations.

Based upon the order of selection, consumer preference was: (1) trees sheared in three successive seasons; (2) trees sheared twice, but in alternate years; (3) trees sheared in the first two successive seasons; (4) unsheared trees; and (5) trees sheared only in the first shearing season (Table 1).

It was found that 83 per cent of the consumers selected sheared trees, while only 17 per cent selected unsheared trees. Many of the sheared trees were unsold due to poor form as a result of the shearing techniques and because of yellow colored needles. By contrast, the unsheared trees were in general, a greener color

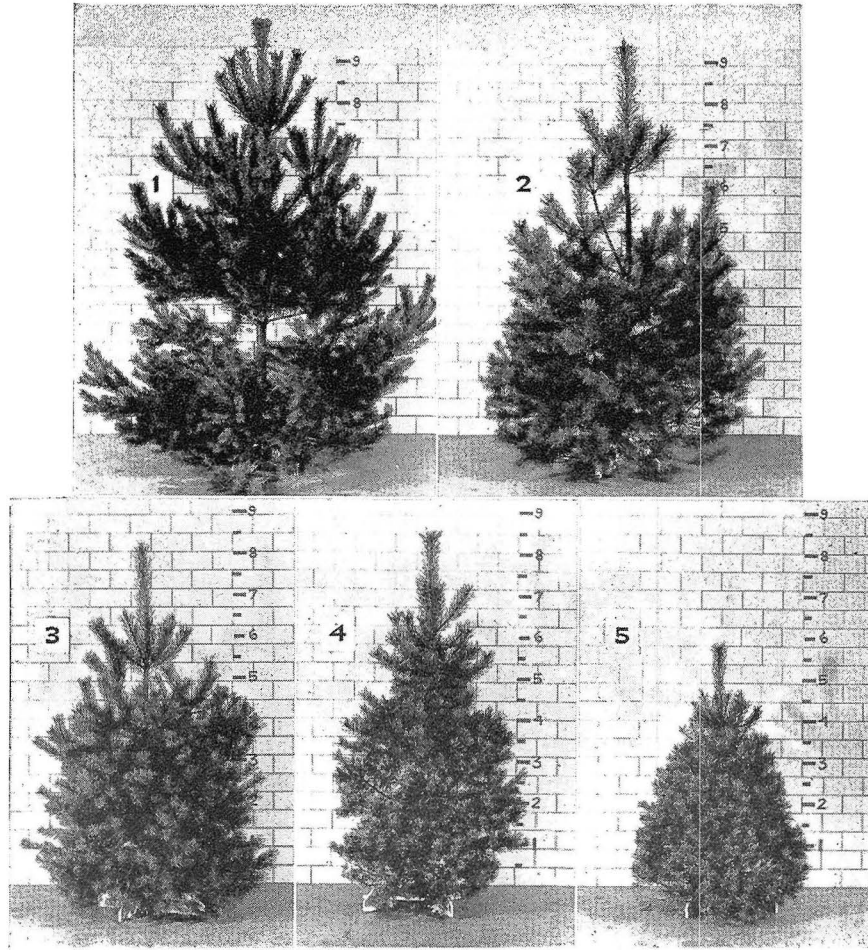


Fig. 1.—Appearance of the five classes of Scotch Pine

TABLE 1.—Shearings, sales, and preference of Christmas trees

Tree class	Seasons sheared after transplanting	Percent of total sales	Consumers rating
1	None	17	4
2	3rd	8	5
3	3rd & 4th	27	3
4	3rd & 5th	28	2
5	3rd, 4th, & 5th	20	1

than the sheared trees.

The order of importance of the factors which were evaluated by the purchaser when selecting an ideal Christmas tree were: (1) shape; (2) fullness or density; (3) color; (4) straightness of stem; (5) height; and (6) the spread or width of the crown.

The consumer was interested first in the general shape of the tree, preferring a good conical dense tree in place of an open and/or lopsided tree. It is interesting to note that color was listed as the third factor in selecting a Christmas tree, however, oftentimes this factor alone caused the buyer to reject the tree over good form and density. For example, 8 of the first 20 trees sold were sheared consecutive years. Only two more trees of this group were selected of the remaining 56 trees sold. This group of trees had good shape and density, however, the trees were a yellow color instead of a good green color.

Eighty-two per cent of the consumers were satisfied with Scotch pine as a Christmas tree because of good shape due to shearing, size, density, good green color, and the retention of the needles on the tree. The biggest objection to the purchased sheared trees was a crooked stem. Approximately 90% of these buyers qualified their satisfactory comments as to the difficulty in fitting stands to the trees.

Unsheared trees had the highest percentage of completely satisfied buyers, however these were among the last to be sold. Only one unsheared control was sold to the first 20 buyers. The high percentage of satisfaction suggests that open, well shaped trees, with good green color are desired over sheared trees with poor color and good shape and density.

Eighteen per cent of the consumers were not satisfied, due to yellowish colored needles, crooked main stem, poor form and density, and the fact that some preferred other conifers as Christmas trees.

From the above findings it seems evident that the Christmas tree growers must be aware of the desires of the consumer and that good cultural practices are necessary to produce high quality Christmas trees. One of the important cultural practices is a proper shearing program.