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Texas Agricultural Extension Service

People Helping People

Texas Christmas Trees Make Good "Scents"



Texas Agricultural Extension Service • Zerle L. Carpenter, Director
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Texas Christmas Trees Make Good "Scents"

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Christmas trees fill homes and businesses with beauty and create a festive Christmas mood. When the tree is authentic, a fresh, pine fragrance provides an irresistible combination. For the freshest tree possible, choose a Texas grown product — a *real* Christmas tree!

The Texas Christmas Tree

In the past, Christmas trees were shipped to Texas from distant states where they were cut weeks or even months earlier to meet heavy seasonal demand. Warm Texas temperatures and weeks without water caused the trees to dry out and shed their needles. Now, Christmas trees are grown in Texas and almost 300,000 per year are available to provide you with a fresher choice. A Texas tree will keep its rich, green color and delicate pine scent because the trees reach their destinations around the state within a few days after being cut. What could be fresher?

You may purchase Texas Christmas trees on lots in cities and towns or directly from the farm where your family can "choose and cut" your own. Texas trees are primarily Virginia or Afghan pines which are full, long-needle pines. You will find the prices and appearance of these pines competitive with northern imports.

Production

Texas Christmas tree growers plant 1.2 million seedlings each year on about 3200 acres, but only a portion of that number are harvested annually for sale to the public. Growers must combat weeds, drought, insects, diseases and animals for at least four years so trees can reach their potential height and beauty. In the fall, trees are sprayed with a safe vegetable dye to enhance the green color consumers have come to expect in Christmas trees. (Inherently, trees that are still growing in the fall turn slightly yellow due to natural chemical changes.) In addition, growers shear and prune the pines two or three times a year to develop full, well-shaped trees. Each year, the Christmas tree industry adds thousands of jobs and \$3 million in sales to the state's economy.

* Extension forestry specialist and Extension consumer information specialist respectively.

What To Look For

Look for trees that are tagged with the state of Texas logos or for a sign that advertises Texas trees. Many trees will have tags similar to the logo below indicating the growers are members of the Texas Christmas Tree Growers Association. The tag is your guarantee of freshness. If you do not see indications of Texas grown trees, ask for them! For information on local "choose-and-cut" tree farms, write or call your county Extension agent.

Fresh trees have a pleasant, pine fragrance and pliable, green needles that bend when squeezed in your hand and return to their original shape when released. They will not have dry needles which break easily and fall off. Tree shape and size is personal preference, but be sure you select a tree that is the proper height and width for the intended area in your home or business.



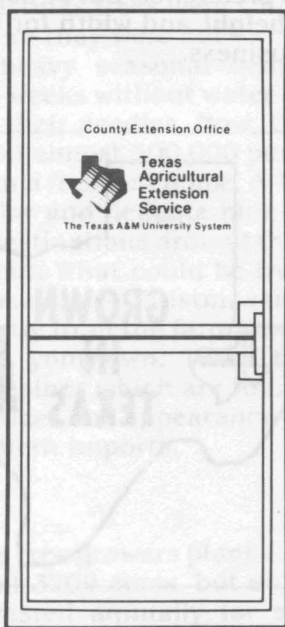
Care

Texas Christmas trees are still growing when they are harvested, so place the trunk immediately in a container of water and store the tree in a covered or shaded area until you are ready to decorate it. Fresh-cut trees will initially absorb from one-half to one gallon of water per day. Remove loose, interior needles by tapping the tree on the patio or driveway a few times. Interior needles turn brown when they no longer get direct sunlight; this is not a sign of dryness.

When the tree has been stored for about a week, saw an inch off the base before placing it in a water-holding stand.

Check the water daily for the first week to keep the stand full. Do not let the water level fall below the tree's cut base. Proper water absorption helps the tree keep its needles, shape and fragrance. To prevent premature drying of the needles, place your tree away from heat sources such as warm air ducts, plate glass windows on southern exposures and space heaters. A dry tree is not only unattractive, but can also be a fire hazard. You will be amazed how long your Texas Christmas tree will stay fresh and beautiful throughout the holiday season!

The place to go when you need to know . . .



. . . about agriculture, home economics, 4-H and youth or community resource development. Drop by or call your county Extension office. You'll find friendly, well-trained agents ready to serve you with up-to-date information, advice and publications. **Your county Extension office. . . the place to go when you need to know!**

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