



# Selection and Care of Christmas Trees

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## Selecting the Right Tree

Selection of the “perfect” Christmas tree can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, and by following a few simple procedures, a tree which meets your needs can be easier to find.

- First, determine where in the home the tree will be displayed, the size required to appropriately fill the space allotted – remember the ceiling height, and whether all sides will be displayed.
- Second, determine whether you wish to harvest your own tree or prefer to purchase one already cut. If you wish to select and then harvest a tree, ‘choose and cut’ farms offer a wide variety of species and sizes, often quite close to home. A large number of retail stores, civic and charitable groups, and other organizations offer pre-cut trees. Many Oklahoma farms also provide pre-cut trees for purchase.

In Oklahoma, there are a number of native-grown trees available, such as Virginia pine, Leyland cypress, white pine, and Arizona cypress. Several other tree species can also be found on Oklahoma farms. Below are listed characteristics of some of the more popular tree species.

**Virginia pine** has the good qualities of other pines such as fragrance, needle retention, and suitability for ornaments.

**Arizona cypress** can be found in colors ranging from green to almost silver. Arizona cypress holds its leaves well, but requires a great deal of water after harvesting to keep fresh.

**White pine** has softer-textured needles with more pliable limbs than firs or spruces. Needle retention of white pines is good, but not as good as other pines.

**Leyland cypress** is a relative newcomer to the Oklahoma market. It has a lighter green color than some species, and has soft flexible limbs. It also has a very attractive shape and does not produce resinous sap. Leyland cypress dries rapidly in a warm house if not kept well-watered.

As pre-cut trees, Fraser fir, Noble fir, and Nordmann fir have excellent fragrance, good needle retention, and will retain freshness. These species also hold ornaments well.

Freshness is an important key when selecting a Christmas tree. A relatively simple test for freshness is to bend the needles. Fresh needles of firs and spruces will snap somewhat like a carrot, but are not brittle. Pine needles will bend if fresh, but will break if they are very dry. Of course, the freshest trees are those that are cut at the farm and immediately taken home

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## Caring for a Tree after Purchase

Assuming a relatively fresh Christmas tree was purchased, there are certain procedures that will assist in maintaining this freshness.

- The base should be sawed off about one inch above the original cut, and the base placed in a container of water. Sprinkling or misting the branches and needles will also help retain freshness.
- If the tree is bought several days before it is to be decorated, it should be stored outside in a cool, shaded area.



- The base of the tree should be kept in water throughout the entire period that the tree is in use. Research has indicated that no water additives are needed, but it is critical that the tree's base not be allowed to dry.
- When displaying the tree, be sure the stand is strong enough to support the tree.
- Be sure the tree is placed away from sources of heat. Trees do not cause fires but will support combustion when they cease to take up water and become dry.
- Do not leave tree lights on unless someone is at home.
- Trees should be removed prior to becoming overly dry. The longer the tree is indoors, the greater the risk of it drying due to loss of moisture.

## Summary

The selection and decoration of a Christmas tree is an important part of many families' traditional holiday activities. By following a few simple guidelines, trees can be chosen and cared for in a manner that enhances the enjoyment of a special season.

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