



While artificial trees have enjoyed increased sales for the past couple of decades, recently there has been a resurgence of buying live trees.

Here are some tips for picking out the perfect tree.

The way to obtain the freshest tree is to harvest it yourself at a Christmas tree farm. This way, you are guaranteed a “fresh” tree rather than one that may have been harvested several weeks earlier. If cutting your tree is not possible, here are some ways to check for freshness at a Christmas tree sales lot:

- First, give the tree a light but vigorous shake. Only a few interior needles should fall out of the tree if it is fresh. If a pile of brown needles appears on the ground below the tree, particularly from the branch tips, it is not a fresh tree.
- Next, reach into a branch and pull the needles gently through your hand as you move out towards the tip. The needles should bend, not break, as your fingers run across them. If they break, it is not a fresh tree.

Regardless of whether you buy a tree from a lot or cut it yourself, once you get the tree home, leave it outside while you set the tree stand up. The choice of a stand is probably the most critical factor in maintaining the freshness of the tree once in the home. The stand should be able to hold ½ to one gallon of water as your new Christmas tree may absorb up to this amount in the first day. A good rule of thumb is a tree will use 1 quart of water per day for every inch trunk diameter at the base. If you have a tree with a three-inch base, it may use three quarts of water per day.

Key Tips to Reduce Fire Risk

- ◆ Never let the tree stand become empty for more than six hours.
- ◆ Do not place the tree in direct sunlight or near other heat sources such as heat ducts, vents, fireplaces and radiators.

Just before you bring the tree in the house:

- Cut the base about one-inch from the bottom. Cutting the base will open the sap-filled tracheid (the pores responsible for transporting water) and allows water to be absorbed into the tree. The base cut does not have to be slanted; the angle makes little difference in the amount of water consumed.
- Wash the stand out with a solution of about a capful of bleach to a cup of water, to reduce the growth of microorganisms that may plug up the tree’s pores and reduce its ability to uptake water.

Once the tree is in the stand, add water and never let the stand become empty. If the stand becomes empty for more than six hours, the tree’s pores will plug up. Once the pores are plugged, water uptake will be significantly reduced, the tree will dry out, and the needles will soon begin to fall. If the tree stand does dry up for half a day or more, there is nothing that can be done other than to pull the tree out of the stand and re-cut the base – not a pleasant task once the lights and ornaments are already up.

Nothing needs to be added to the water in the stand to improve needle retention. The commercial “tree preservative” products do not significantly increase the life of the tree.

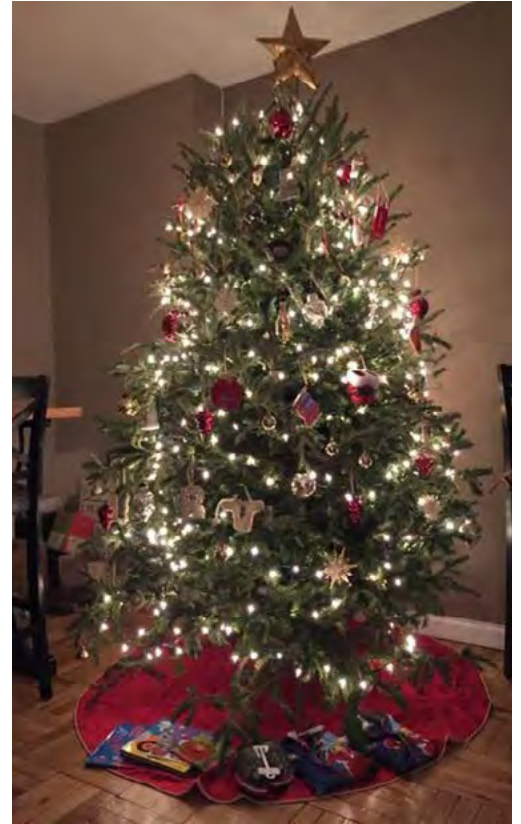
Place the stand in a spot that receives only indirect light from windows. Be sure to place the tree away from other heat sources such as heat ducts/vents, fireplaces and radiators. Placing the tree away from sources of heat will reduce water loss from the tree, prolong its freshness, and reduce fire risk.

Which is the best tree?

Each species has good points, but the Fraser fir is probably one of the favorites. The tree is very fragrant, has excellent needle retention, and the branches are stiff enough to hold ornaments. Balsam fir is another good choice, though the needles do not last as long, and the branches are not quite as stiff. Canadian fir, another popular fir, appears to have qualities similar to Fraser fir and is also becoming a popular Christmas tree.

If you are looking for a longer needled tree, the most popular choice is Scotch pine; possibly the most popular tree in the country. It also is very fragrant, has excellent needle retention, and the branches are stiff. White pine is another pine commonly sold at Christmas tree stands. The White pine has a fair fragrance, but the needle retention is not quite as good as Scotch pine, and the branches are very flexible meaning heavy ornaments may fall off. White pines do have very soft needles, so if you are going to run into the tree in the middle of the night, this is the one!

Spruces are not as popular primarily due to their poor needle retention. If the tree you find in the tree lot is a spruce, make sure you follow the steps from above to test the freshness and make sure the needles are not too sharp for your needs. Spruce will have the pointiest needles out of all the potential Christmas trees.



How do I dispose of my live Christmas tree?

All homeowners are encouraged to have a portable fire extinguisher on hand, especially if they have a live Christmas tree.

Solid waste customers can set their Christmas tree out for curbside collection on their regular garbage day before curbside yard waste collection ends for the season (usually after the second full week in January). Before and after curbside collection ends for the season and for other Scott County residents and businesses, Christmas trees may also be brought to the Davenport Compost Facility.

Whether you set your tree out for curbside pickup or take it to the Compost Facility, Christmas trees must be free of all decorations, the tree stand, and cannot be wrapped in a plastic bag. All of these items are not compostable. Wreaths and garland can be placed in your garbage cart.