



Selection & Care of Christmas Trees for the Home



Cooperative Extension Service • The University of Georgia • College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences • Athens

Live Christmas trees have been brought into homes and decorated during the holiday season for more than 500 years. Each year, more than 33 million live Christmas trees are used in households across the United States. Live Christmas trees have an attractiveness, fragrance, and tradition that cannot be matched with artificial substitutes.

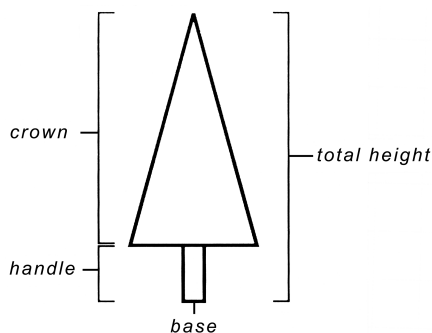
Christmas trees are grown throughout the United States and Canada, and you can choose your tree from a wide variety of species. It takes 5 to 12 years to grow a Christmas tree, and for each tree harvested, two or three seedlings will be planted.

You can select your live Christmas tree from a local retail lot, where there can be a variety of trees from the United States and Canada. Or you can visit a local choose-n-cut Christmas tree farm to cut a fresh tree from the field where it was grown.

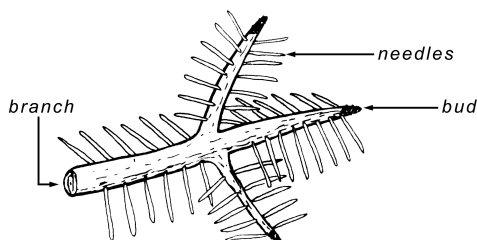
Use this publication as a guide in selecting and maintaining a fresh, attractive, live Christmas tree for the holiday season.

Tree shape, height and foliage characteristics are important features to consider when selecting a tree. Common Christmas tree characteristics are:

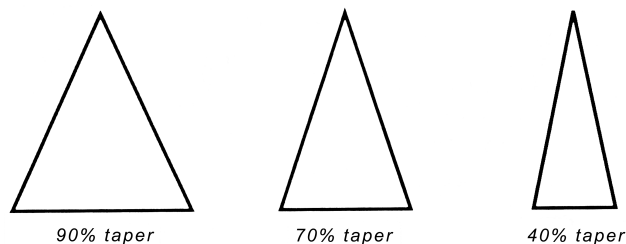
The parts of a tree -



Its branches and needles -



And its overall shape -



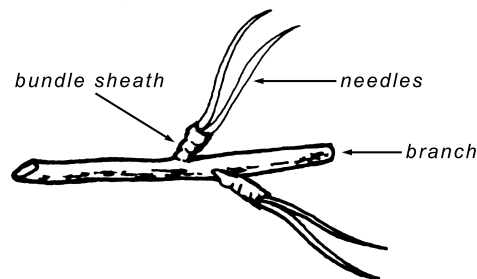
Taper is the relationship of the tree's width to its height. The first tree has a 90 percent taper, with a width 90 percent of its height.

CHRISTMAS TREE SPECIES

There is a variety of Christmas tree species to choose from. You can find most of these on retail lots or growing in your area on a choose-n-cut farm. Christmas trees can be identified by the size, color, and arrangement of their needles. The four common types of Christmas trees are pine, fir, spruce and cedar/cypress.

PINE

Needles are arranged in bundles of two to five, with a bundle sheath holding the bases of the needles together within each bundle.



Virginia Pine - The Virginia Pine has yellow-green needles that are 1.5 to 3 inches long, arranged in bundles of two, and slightly twisted. These pines are grown throughout Georgia, are available on local retail lots, and are the most common trees in Georgia choose-n-cut operations.

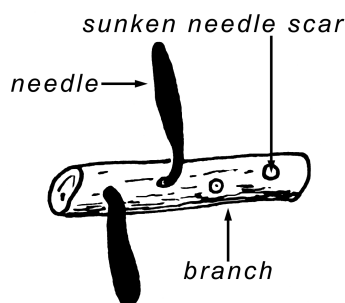
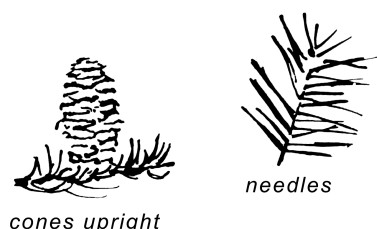
Scotch Pine - The Scotch Pine has needles that are 1.5 to 2.5 inches long and arranged in bundles of two, and it has scaly orange-red bark. These pines are grown throughout the midwest and northeast areas of the United States and are sold on retail lots.

White Pine - The White Pine has blue-green needles that are 3 to 5 inches long and arranged in bundles of five. These pines hold needles well but wilt noticeably. They are grown in central and north Georgia and throughout the Lake States, and are available from retail lots and on choose-n-cut lots in north Georgia.

Sand Pine - The Sand Pine has dark green needles that are 2 to 3.5 inches long and are arranged in bundles of two. This pine is similar to the Virginia Pine and is grown in south Georgia and Florida. It is available at choose-n-cut operations in the southeastern United States.

FIR

Needles are arranged in rows, with one row on each side of a branch. The needles are flat and leave a small circular depressed scar on the branch when removed. The cones are upright.



Balsam Fir - The Balsam Fir has needles that are 1/2 to 1 inch long and are dark green on the top with two silver lines on the bottom. The buds are rounded, yellowish and coated with an aromatic resin. These firs are grown in Canada and the northeastern United States and are available at retail lots.

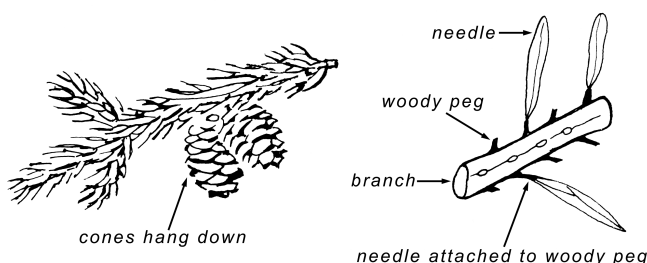
Fraser Fir - The Fraser Fir is similar to the Balsam Fir and is grown in the mountains of North Carolina,

Virginia and Tennessee. These firs are available at retail lots.

Douglas Fir - The Douglas Fir is not a true fir. The needles are dark blue to yellowgreen and completely encircle the branches. The buds are pointed and reddish brown. These trees are grown in the Pacific Northwest and are available at retail lots.

SPRUCE

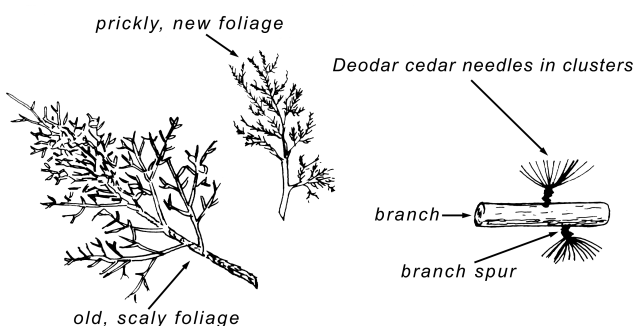
Needles are attached to branches by short pegs and are pointed, four-sided and spiral around branches. The cones hang down.



White Spruce and Blue Spruce - These spruce trees have needles that are 3/4 to 1 inch long and are blue-green (the Blue Spruce's needles are a richer color). The trees grow in Canada and the extreme northern United States. They are available on retail lots and in some choose-n-cut operations in north Georgia.

CEDAR/CYPRESS

Needles are scale-like on old foliage and sharp and prickly on young foliage. Needles of Deodar Cedar are arranged in clusters on short branch spurs.



Eastern Redcedar - The Eastern Redcedar has sharp pointed needles and scale-like leaves on the same tree. The color of the needles ranges from green and blue-green to yellow-green. These trees dry out rapidly after cutting and begin to lose needles, so they must be kept well-supplied with water. They are grown in the piedmont and coastal plain of Georgia and are available at local choose-n-cut operations, but they are rarely

found at retail lots. The Eastern Redcedar is a traditional southern Christmas tree.

Deodar Cedar - The Deodar Cedar has needles arranged in clusters on short spurs on the branches. The color of the needles ranges from waxy blue to blue-green. These trees are common as landscape plants and are available in limited quantities at some choose-n-cut operations.

Leyland Cypress - The Leyland Cypress is similar to the Redcedar, but the needles are softer and more scale-like. These trees are available at choose-n-cut operations and as live container-grown trees at nurseries.

SELECTING YOUR TREE

Keep these points in mind when choosing a specific tree:

- u Check the height of the ceiling in the room where you will display your tree. Select a tree that is at least one foot shorter than the ceiling height.
- u Run your fingers over the branch along the needles. Needles should be pliable and adhere to the branches. They should bend; but not break or fall off.
- u Shake or bounce the tree to be sure that the needles are firmly attached. If the tree is fresh, few needles should fall off. Some loss of needles inside the tree is common.
- u Avoid trees that have a wilted look.
- u Make sure the handle of the tree is straight. The handle must be 6 to 8 inches long to allow placement in the tree stand.
- u Check for insects and dead needles inside the tree crown. Have dead needles shaken or blown out when you buy the tree.

CARING FOR THE TREE IN YOUR HOME

- u If you don't plan to put the tree up right away, cut one inch off of the base, put the tree in a bucket of water, and stand it in a shady place.
- u When you bring the tree indoors, cut 1/2 to 1 inch off of the base of the trunk and place in a tree stand that holds at least 1 gallon of water.
- u Do not place the tree near a fireplace, heater vents or other heat sources.
- u Always keep the tree well-supplied with water. Check the water level in the stand several times each day. Trees may use several quarts of water a day.

- u Never let the water level fall below the base of the tree. If this occurs, the cut end can seal over, preventing further water uptake. The tree must then be taken down and a fresh cut made to allow water uptake.
- u Adding aspirin, soda water, bleach or sugar to the water in the tree stand is no more effective in keeping the tree fresh than adding plain water each day.

FIREPROOFING YOUR TREE

- u The best way to keep a tree fresh and fire resistant is to keep it supplied with water at all times.
- u A fresh tree supplied with water presents little fire hazard. As long as the tree takes up water, it will be relatively fire resistant.
- u Do not allow the water level in the tree stand to fall below the base of the tree.
- u Trees can be sprayed with antitranspirants, which are clear films that slow water loss from the needles.
- u Fire Marshall-approved treatments can be sprayed on trees to reduce flammability. These contain borax or other flame retardants. Check with the salesperson when you purchase your tree or with the fire department or county agent for specific fire-retardant treatments.
- u Use only UL-approved lights and nonflammable decorations.
- u Never leave home or go to bed with the Christmas tree lights on.

COMBATING INSECT PROBLEMS

- u Be aware of aphids and other insects that can enter the home on the Christmas tree and emerge in the warm house.
- u Inspect the tree before bringing it indoors. Shake and bounce the tree on the pavement to dislodge insects and other foreign objects.
- u If you find insects, spray the tree with an indoor-outdoor aerosol insecticide containing pyrethrins before bringing the tree inside. These insecticides are available at grocery and discount stores.
- u If insects appear after the tree is in the house (look for sticky drops on the carpet and presents), spray the tree with an indoor-outdoor approved aerosol insecticide containing pyrethrins. Be sure to follow label directions when using any insecticide.

USING YOUR TREE AFTER CHRISTMAS

- ◆ Grind the tree for mulch and place in flower beds or gardens.
- ◆ Use the main stem to burn in the fireplace after removing branches and needles.
- ◆ Create a fish attractor by weighting the base of the tree and sinking it in a pond.

ATTENTION! PESTICIDE PRECAUTIONS!

1. Observe all directions, restrictions and precautions on pesticide labels. It is dangerous, wasteful and illegal to do otherwise.
 2. Store all pesticides behind locked doors, in original containers with labels intact. **KEEP PESTICIDES OUT OF THE REACH OF CHILDREN.**
 3. Use pesticides at correct label dosages and intervals to avoid illegal residues or injury to plants and animals.
 4. Apply pesticides carefully to avoid drift or contamination of non-target areas.
 5. Surplus pesticides and containers should be disposed of in accordance with label instructions so that contamination of water and other hazards will not result.
 6. Follow directions on the pesticide label regarding restrictions as required by state and federal laws and regulations.
 7. Avoid any actions that may threaten an endangered species or its habitat. Your county Extension agent can inform you of endangered species in your area; help you identify them; and, through the Fish and Wildlife Service Field Office, identify actions that may threaten endangered species or their habitats.
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