



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Hardin County Extension News Release

For Further Information Contact:

Mark Badertscher

Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator

Phone – 419-674-2297

E-Mail – badertscher.4@osu.edu

For Immediate Release – December 6, 2017

Christmas Tree Selection and Care

Hardin County – Since the shopping blitz started earlier this year an individual may have more time to think about traditional holiday activities. Maybe this is the year to deck the halls with an actual Christmas tree rather than searching for the artificial one buried in the attic. Christmas trees may be purchased at local box stores, garden centers, and Christmas tree lots. Some organizations have them as their annual fundraiser activity. Trees may also be selected at local Christmas tree farms. Nearby Christmas tree farms may be located at <http://ohiochristmastree.org/>.

Pine, spruce, and fir are the most common conifers used for Christmas trees. Conifers are trees that have cones as fruiting structures and leaves that are described as needle or scale-like. One can identify the type of conifer by counting the number of needles attached to the stem. If needles are attached in clusters of 2-5, it is a pine. Spruce and fir have individual needles directly attached to the stem. To distinguish between a spruce and fir, feel the texture, shape, and rolling ability of the needle. Spruce needles tend to be sharply pointed and easily roll between your fingers. Fir needles tend to be soft and flat and are difficult to roll. The display characteristics of common Christmas trees are given below:

Scotch pine -- is known for the contrast between its blue green needles and orange-red bark. It has good needle retention with strong branches. Needles are one to three inches long in bundles of two.

White pine -- has greener needles than scotch with a soft, glossy look. It has very good needle retention but weaker branches for decorations; this tree is known for a pleasant holiday scent. Needles are 2 ½ to 5 inches long in bundles of five.

Blue spruce -- has fair needle retention with strong branches. Needles are prickly and silver-blue in color and the tree has a strong, pungent scent.

Black Hills spruce – has needles that are shorter and softer than the Colorado blue spruce. Trees have excellent color and have a very traditional Christmas tree appearance. Stiff branches are excellent for hanging ornaments.

Norway spruce -- has fair needle retention with dense and strong branches. Needles are dark green and the tree has a traditional holiday scent.

Fraser fir -- has excellent needle retention and thick branches for heavy decoration. Needles are green above and silver below and the tree has a medium evergreen scent.

Canaan fir (pronounced ka NANE) -- is a type of balsam fir that has good needle retention and medium branches for decoration. Needles are dark green on both sides and the tree has a strong evergreen scent.

If you select a tree on a lot, always check for freshness. Trees will vary in needle retention based on how long the tree has been cut and how the tree was handled, but there are several ways to check for freshness. Look at the needles. They should have a healthy green color with a strong fragrance. Also take a branch between your thumb and forefinger about six to eight inches from the tip and gently run your hand out to the branch tip. A few needles may fall off, but most should stay. Another way to check for freshness is to tap the base of the tree on the ground. Only a few needles should fall off if the tree is fresh. Also look at the bottom of the trunk. If the tree is fresh, it should be sticky with resin or sap.

When you get the tree home, make a fresh cut at the stem base, removing one inch of the old trunk. This will open up the vascular tissue and allow the tree to take up water more easily. Then, immediately place the tree in a bucket or in a tree stand with ample water. Do not allow the tree to dry out or a new seal will form on the cut trunk. Check the water daily because the tree can absorb up to a gallon of water on the first day. Place the tree in a cool spot away from heat such as furnace vents. As long as the tree is taking up water, it is relatively fire resistant. However, do not set the tree next to the fireplace, television, or candles. Also check Christmas lights for loose connections and worn wires.

If you select a tree this year, harvesting one from a tree farm will guarantee that your tree is fresh and should last a long time. However, a properly selected cut tree should easily last until Christmas with the proper care. A real tree may be something to consider for your holiday season and may become part of your family memories for Christmas. Agri-tourism activities are included with many Christmas tree farms, which add to the enjoyment of searching for the perfect tree.

Article written by Ed Lentz, OSU Extension-Hancock County and edited by Mark Badertscher, OSU Extension-Hardin County.