

## **Christmas Tree Farms – by Ed Lentz, Hancock County OSU Extension**

Fields of corn or wheat, pastures dotted with cows, or idyllic farmsteads with a historic barn are images that many may have of farm life in Ohio. But Ohio agriculture is more than crops and livestock.

Christmas tree farms are another type of agriculture that thrives on the fertile soils of Ohio. They provide a source of income on smaller acres of land than the larger grain or livestock farms.

Christmas tree farms are an example of land production that is sustainable and renewable. They provide a long term rotation away from grain crops, provide habitat for wildlife, and protect soils from erosion. Once Christmas is over, trees can be recycled as kindling, firewood, mulch, or placed in ponds for fish habitat.

There are about 500,000 acres in production for Christmas trees in the United States and much of it preserves green space. There are about 21,000 Christmas tree growers in the United States and more than 100,000 people are employed full- or part-time by the industry.

It can take as few as four years or as many as 15 years for a tree to reach six or seven feet in height. Growth rate depends on environmental conditions and tree species.

The average growing time is seven years, and this time is often occupied with fighting heavy rain, wind, hail and droughts. Trees have to be pruned on a regular basis to get the desired shape by selling time and in this area, trees have to be protected from deer.

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.

Pine trees may be identified by having needles in clusters that may be long or short. The number of needles in the cluster is one way to identify the pine species.

Spruce trees have individual needles attached to the stem. The needles are sharply pointed and easily roll between your fingers.

Fir trees also have individual needles that are attached to the stem. However, fir needles are soft, flat and cannot be easily rolled between your fingers.

Christmas tree lots and local tree farms have several species of each conifer type that often includes the following:

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; tree is known for a pleasant holiday scent. Needles are 2 ½ to 5 inches long in bundles of five.

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

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.

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.

There are many Christmas tree lots in the communities in our area; however, you may want to support our local tree farms.

There are three in the area: Cranberry Hollow near Ottawa, Homestead Fall Farms east of Findlay near Alvada, and Kaleidoscope Farms, west of Findlay near Mount Cory. Kaleidoscope Farms was recognized this past summer at the Ohio State Fair for having the Grand Champion Christmas Tree.

All the farms have activities that can be enjoyed by the family while selecting the perfect tree. Harvesting a tree from a local farm will guarantee that your tree is fresh and it should easily last through the holiday season.

A real tree may be something to consider for your holiday season. Selecting that special tree at a local farm and decorating it later may become one of your family's cherished Christmas memories.