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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Truth About Christmas Tree Care



(Federal Way) Those who reside in the Pacific Northwest realize they are fortunate to have the unique opportunity to live in an area that supports many different varieties of plants, vegetables, and flowers, but unknown to many, the same is true for Christmas trees. More Christmas trees are grown in Oregon than any other state and the Pacific

Northwest is the best area in the world for growing Noble Firs. No matter which species suits your tastes, it's important to understand how to keep that aromatic miracle of nature as fresh and enjoyable as possible during the holiday season.

You have probably heard many different “facts” about caring for your Christmas tree that are often confusing. So which is right? Which is better? We would like to clear up some misinformation that you may have heard about Christmas tree care. The basis for most of this information has been found through comprehensive studies performed by Horticulturists Gary Chastagner and Joe Hudak from the WSU Christmas Tree Research Center.

Needle Shed

It is normal for any Christmas tree to shed a few needles, but it is not normal to shed a lot of them. When you go shopping for a tree, bend a few branches and

needles. If they bend easily without breaking, the tree is fresh and still has a high water content. If they snap, the tree is already starting to dry out and should be avoided. Many reputable Christmas tree farms and lots have large shaking machines and for a fee (or often



for free), they will use these shakers to shake your tree so that any inner needles or insects are shaken out. This greatly reduces the number of needles that will end up on your floor.

Water Additives

Experiments were conducted on a large number of commercial and home-made additives that have been added to water in tree stands throughout the years in hopes of extending the freshness, or “keepability”, of Christmas trees. The results were not surprising- none of them helped. Pure tap water (of any temperature) is absorbed most efficiently. The molecules in additives such as syrup, salt, alcohol, or so-called “Tree Food” are larger and more difficult for trees to absorb and often even reduce the uptake of water to the rest of the tree.

Cutting the Trunk

It has been speculated that removing bark from around the base of the tree will help absorb more water than a simple straight horizontal cut, but this is not so. Since the two outermost rings are responsible for 60% of all water absorption, removing material from this area will drastically reduce the amount of water the tree can absorb, drying it out prematurely. It is also not true that water transpires through the thin, slick outer cambium layer. Almost all water is absorbed through the center of the tree, so making a straight horizontal cut exposes the most area while not damaging other sections of the trunk. After getting your tree home, it is necessary to cut only ½” off the end of the trunk to open new pores that enables the tree to absorb water again, unless it

has been cut less than 24 hours prior. A sap plug will form after 24 hours that blocks water from being absorbed, so keep water in your tree stand at all times and never let the water level drop below the bottom of the trunk or a new cut will need to be made (but of course, your tree has already been decorated at that point!).

Tree Stands



Surprisingly, it has been found that only 3 tree stands on the market today are designed to hold an adequate amount of water. According to the NCTA (National Christmas Tree Association), a good rule of thumb is that a typical Christmas tree will absorb 1 qt of water for every inch of stem diameter per day. This means that a 4” diameter trunk requires 1 gal of water each day. This rate will vary slightly depending on the species of your tree and more water may be absorbed in the first few days.

Watering Devices

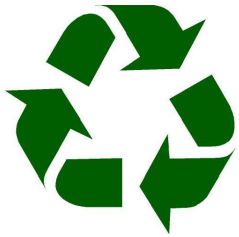
Three basic categories of supplemental watering devices are available on the market- funnels, water reservoirs, and tree “IV” systems. Funnels make it easy to add water to your tree stand without crawling under your tree- you can do it standing up. This makes watering your tree very convenient, but be careful not to add too much water or your stand will overflow. Some funnels do come with a dipstick that enables you to check the water level in your stand.

Add-on water reservoirs come in many different sizes and shapes and add an extra 1-2 gallons of water available to your tree, thereby reducing the number of times you need to add water. Water is automatically siphoned from the water reservoir to the tree stand via a small tube only when needed, so there is no chance of your stand overflowing.



Tree “IV” systems are small probes inserted into your tree trunk after drilling a small hole. The idea is to get water from an outside reservoir directly into the tree’s trunk, like an IV used in hospitals. However, these systems do not work. Since a large hole must be drilled through the trunk, you are removing the very material that absorbs water up to the branches. It is a novel idea, but lacks in practicality.

Tree Recycling



It is very important to recycle your Christmas tree. They are grown as crops, just like corn or cotton, and it is our responsibility to give back to the Earth by having our Christmas trees recycled to be used again as mulch and absorbed back into the soil. Some cities have one or two days after Christmas where they offer curbside recycling- you can put your Christmas tree by your curb and the city will pick it up and recycle it for you. If you do not have a curbside recycling program in your area, you can visit www.earth911.com to find a recycling program nearby, or call them at 1-877-EARTH911. Some nurseries will also recycle your Christmas tree for a nominal fee.

Tree Safety

It is a huge misconception that it is dangerous to have a real Christmas tree in your home. It has been proven time and again that it is extremely difficult to get a fresh Christmas tree to support a flame. You may have seen segments on the news that show a Christmas tree going up in flames at the light of a match, but what they do not show you is that the tree was doused with gasoline prior to film rolling. Research has shown that even when using a propane torch, needles only smolder and turn black, but do not burn since they are made up of almost 85% water. On the other hand, fake trees will burn, melt, and emit dangerous toxic fumes into the air, so real trees are actually safer to have in your home than fake ones. The same holds true for large live plants or

trees in your home. Can you imagine a time when house plants are deemed a fire hazard?

There are rare circumstances where extremely dry Christmas trees have caught on fire due to negligence. They were either too near a fireplace or heater, or high wattage outdoor lights were used indoors. The truth is that many more holiday fires are started by having drapes or furniture too near a heat source or candles that have tipped over.

Where To Find A Quality Tree

So where can you find a high quality, fresh Christmas tree? To be absolutely sure your tree has been cut only recently and doesn't have any defects, you can visit a U-Cut Christmas tree farm and cut it yourself. To find a reputable tree farm in your area, visit the NCTA website at www.realchristmastrees.org, type in your zip code, and you will be shown a list of tree farms in your area.

When choosing a tree from a roadside lot, be careful- they may have been harvested up to a month ago. Most tree lot operators have limited knowledge about Christmas trees, so it is our responsibility to check the branches and needles for freshness before purchasing.

Trees can be purchased from home improvement stores or in grocery store parking lots for very little money, but the quality is usually the lowest. Christmas tree growers tag their trees for quality based on four levels: Premium, #1, #2, and Cull. Premium trees are of the highest quality- they have no defects and are perfectly uniform. The #1 graded trees may have one small flaw (usually not noticeable), the #2 graded trees will have two flaws, and trees graded as Cull are of the very lowest quality. Tree prices at stores and lots are not based on these quality grades, so it is up to the customer to find the higher quality trees. Trees are purchased from lot operators and

large chain stores based on this quality grading system, and most purchase the lower quality trees to create a higher profit margin for themselves.

For those who live in the Puget Sound area, you can also now order your Christmas tree online at www.TreeSleigh.com and they will deliver it to your home, set it up for you, and remove it after the holidays for recycling. Only fresh, premium-grade trees are sold through TreeSleigh.com, and they offer a quality guarantee.



A Word About Wreaths

Real wreaths are made from Christmas tree boughs- the largest limbs toward the bottom of the tree. They are formed in shapes while they are still fresh and pliable. There is no way to extend the freshness of a wreath like you can by adding water to a Christmas tree stand, so make sure you purchase wreaths of high quality and freshness. Most quality wreaths are made using Noble Fir boughs since they stay fresh longer and have a wonderful pine aroma.

In Conclusion

Now that you are armed with the truth about Christmas tree care, you can confidently choose a high quality Christmas tree and keep it fresh... and be proud that you are keeping your holiday traditions alive by displaying a beautiful real Christmas tree in your home. Have a very safe and happy holiday season!

Todd Miner is the owner of TreeSleigh.com™ and can be contacted via e-mail at 'todd@treesleigh.com' or by phone at 1-877-TREE-2-ME. Any questions or comments about Christmas trees are always welcomed.