

# Selection and Care of the Christmas Tree

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



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**PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson**

**Choosing a real Christmas tree can be a fun outing for the family. The lasting beauty of a Christmas tree depends on careful selection and proper pre-holiday treatment.**

You are likely aware of the reported shortage of Christmas trees for the 2019 holiday season. There are fewer Christmas trees being grown than 10 to 15 years ago, yet more people are buying them. And, they're paying a hefty price to boot.

According to the National Christmas Tree Associa-

tion, two major tree-producing states, North Carolina and Oregon, have fewer trees to offer this year than in years past. Despite the shortage, there will still likely be enough trees to go around but it's highly recommended that folks purchase their Christmas tree as soon as possible to obtain a high-quality tree.

The shortage did not come as a complete surprise. The cause of the shortage can be traced back to the Great Recession the country endured nearly ten years ago and it requires about 10 years for a Christmas tree seedling to grow to a harvestable size. During the economic downturn, tree farm-





ers were limiting their crops to save money during a time of decreased demand.

For many folks — both the young and not-so-young — a fresh Christmas tree complete with lights and other decorations provides a delightful focal point to assemble and open those holiday gifts.

How will you select, prepare, and care for your Christmas tree? Even if you put off buying the yule tree until the last minute, there are several steps you should take to ensure adequate safety and full enjoyment of the occasion. The lasting beauty of a Christmas tree depends on careful selection and proper pre-holiday treatment. The following are suggested guidelines:

**Selecting the Tree:** Choosing a real Christmas tree is a fun outing for the whole family and easy to do. Here are a few helpful hints, so your tree isn't bare by Christmas Eve: First, select a tree with fresh, green color. Such trees provide good needle retention, pleasing fragrance, better fire resistance and longer holiday beauty. Second, conduct a simple freshness test. Gently grasp a branch between your thumb and forefinger and pull it toward you. Few needles should come off in your hand if the tree is fresh. Third, try lifting the tree a few inches off the ground and letting it drop on the stump end. Very few green needles should fall off.

**Preparing the Tree:** Once the tree is selected, properly pre-condition it before setting it up inside the home. Imagine that your tree has been cut a while back, packed into trucks, and shipped to its final destination. During this period of transport, the tree's water uptake mechanism at the point of cut becomes blocked with soil, sawdust, and resins from the tree.

To help alleviate the water uptake problems, purchase your tree a little in advance of the time before it is to be set up and decorated. When you get your tree home, cut off the butt of the tree trunk at least one inch above the original cut. Place the trunk in a container of water in a cool location out of doors overnight or even for a couple of days, if possible. This helps the tree to absorb water which will extend the season of freshness and reduce the fire hazard associated with dry trees.

**Caring for the Tree:** When it's time to trim the tree, place it in a tree stand that holds water, and keep it filled throughout its use over the holiday season. Check the water level periodically and refill as needed.

The tree will adsorb a large quantity of water at first (as much as a gallon or more a day depending on the size of the tree). Make sure the water level never drops below the bottom of the trunk.

We think of the holidays as happy times, an occasion for celebration,

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thankfulness and sharing with our family, friends and community. By taking a few preventive measures, you and your family can celebrate a happy, nostalgic, and fire-safe holiday.

### At a Glance

**WHAT:** Master Gardener Training Course

**DATE:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, from February 4 to April 9

**TIME:** 12:00 to 4:00 p.m.

**TOPICS:** A diverse variety of horticulture-related topics will be covered including soil fertility; vegetables; fruit and citrus trees; disease identification and control; insect pest identification and control; weed identification and control; pesticides; Integrated Pest Management; pruning; perennials and annuals; and urban forestry.

**HOW TO APPLY:** Contact the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park located at 4102-B Main St. in La Marque (phone 281-309-5065; e-mail galvcountrymgs@gmail.com). Visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/> for additional details and to download an application.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:** Thursday, December 12

