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# FACT SHEET

## SELECTING AND CARING FOR CHRISTMAS TREES

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The fragrance and beauty of a decorated tree are part of most family Christmas traditions. To keep your Christmas tree from becoming a potential fire hazard, you must carefully select and care for it.

### Selection

Some people use a native species for their Christmas tree. In Texas, the predominant native selection is the cedar or redcedar, which makes a beautiful tree but dries very quickly. However, more Texas-grown Christmas trees, such as Virginia pines, are becoming available each year. Generally, these trees are much fresher when purchased.

Most Christmas trees are purchased from commercial tree sales lots. A majority of these trees have been imported into Texas from northern and western states. They were cut well in advance of the Christmas season, then stored for several weeks.

When selecting a tree from a commercial lot, choose one as fresh as possible. Early selection may be beneficial if all trees were cut at the same time. Check for needle shedding and brittleness, an indication that the tree is too dry. Pull the needles. If they come off the stem easily, the tree is too dry. Bounce the butt of the tree on the ground. If many needles fall, reject the tree.

Also, keep genetic differences in mind while selecting a tree. Different types of trees have varying needle retention abilities which are not related to freshness. Pines, true firs (such as balsam and Fraser) and Douglas-fir have good needle retention after being cut. However, Norway and white spruce may shed needles readily when moved indoors.

Check the shape and size of the tree's base before purchase. Select a tree that will fit your stand. The stand should be designed to hold water. The base of

the tree should be free of lateral branches for at least the first 8 inches to properly fit the stand. Removing large lateral branches often deforms the tree.

### Care

*Water.* After selecting a tree, keep it as fresh as possible. As soon as you get it home, cut about an inch off the base and put the tree in a bucket of clean, warm water. If the tree is not to be decorated immediately, store it outdoors in the shade until ready to use. Check the water level periodically. The tree will take up a larger quantity of water at first, as much as a gallon a day, but will slack off later.

Tests show that a 6-foot Christmas tree will take up between 1 and 2.5 pints per day during the 3-week season. Once the tree is put in a container of water, never allow the container to dry out. Experience shows that needle loss from trees with an interrupted water supply is far greater than needle loss from trees with a continuous supply of water. An interrupted water supply could be worse than no water.

Several home recipes and manufactured products have been used by homeowners in an attempt to prolong the freshness of a cut Christmas tree. A study by Stephens and Ahrens, Connecticut Experiment Station, Valley Laboratory, Windsor, Connecticut, tested commercial preparation and chemical mixtures, all designed to be added to the water reservoir of a Christmas tree stand. None of the additives provided any clear-cut benefit over the use of water alone.

*Fireproofing.* Families can partially fireproof their Christmas tree by using this mixture:

Ingredients	Parts by Measure
borax	9 ounces
boric acid powder	4 ounces
water	1 gallon (warm)

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All of these ingredients can be purchased at most local drug stores. Use a garden sprayer to apply the fireproofing material. Even with good coverage, the tree will not be completely fire resistant.

When you move the tree indoors, set it away from fireplaces or other heating units. Also, do not place the tree where a heating vent will blow dry air on the foliage.

If Christmas tree lights are broken or have cracked insulation, discard them and buy new ones. Never string lights on a metal tree. If you must use one, light it indirectly or externally.

*Live Christmas trees.* Many Texans display a balled and burlapped tree at Christmas. This tree can be used in your home, then planted outdoors once the Christmas season has passed. To use a container Christmas tree successfully, follow these steps:

1. Select a tree adapted to your area.
2. Allow the tree to go through a transition period in an unheated garage or carport before being moved into the house. The tree should not remain in the house more than a week to 10 days.
3. Adequate watering is a must. Keep the root ball damp but not flooded.
4. Decorate the tree carefully. Use lights that give off minimal heat. Do not flock live Christmas trees.
5. When the time comes to plant the tree, do not move it into freezing temperatures. Do not remove the burlap and strapping. This keeps the soil around the roots solid and secure. Fill in around the ball with soil taken from the planting hole. A heavy mulch around the base of the tree helps prevent freezing. Stake the tree to prevent wind-throw during the first growing season. Provide adequate moisture during dry periods.



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2.5M—11-81, Revision

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