

HOME & GARDEN

Caring for, planting your Christmas tree

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

"Oh, Tannenbaum, Oh Tannenbaum,
How lovely are your branches."

Actually I've had many Christmas trees that did not have lovely branches and had to be loved more for their eccentricity than for their beauty.

My first winter in Greenfield, a friend of mine invited me and my three daughters, then aged 7, 9 and 10, up to the Rowe wilderness to choose and cut our own Christmas tree. This idyllic excursion ended in tears, wet feet and frozen fingers. The tree was lopsided and spindly. Looking back, I suspect it was a hemlock because it began to drop its needles almost immediately.

BETWEEN THE ROWS

By planting and caring for your own Christmas trees you can be sure of getting a handsome tree and a variety that you favor. It will be more freshly cut and less likely to dry out quickly. And that tree cutting excursion with child or grandchild is guaranteed to be a success.

To avoid such a debacle in the future, once we arrived in Heath we started to plant our own Christmas trees. Although they will not be ready for another four or five years, my hopes are high.

Christmas trees fall into three main groups. First there are the fir trees, which are not only desirable for their appearance but also for their Christmas fragrance.

The balsam is most common in the northeast. It has short flat needles, and its foliage is quite dense, unlike the notorious hemlock, it keeps its needles well. This year I have a balsam, given us by a young neighbor, and so far it looks as though we will have no funny stories to tell about it. It is a very good-looking tree.



BALSAM FIR

Then there are the pines. Scotch and Austrian pines make handsome Christmas trees, and retailers often charge a premium for them. The pines have longer needles than the firs and keep them through the holidays with very little drop.

Finally there is the spruce, a gorgeous evergreen. Our first year in Heath we took down a dense, beautifully shaped

spruce that grew in front of the house because it kept the southern sun from coming in. This was certainly the biggest and one of the best looking trees we ever had, but for weeks we bore the battle scars of getting it into the house. They have short sharp needles, and to say that they are prickly to handle is a gross understatement.

Evergreens (and other trees) are available every spring from the conservation district, and they can also be ordered from any one of the reputable tree nurseries.

As with any plant, the trees should be transplanted with care. If they arrive with bare roots as ours did, they should be soaked in a pail of water for a couple of hours before planting.



DOUGLAS FIR

If you are planting only a few trees, perhaps in a suburban yard, it is wise to prepare and fertilize the soil beforehand. The seedlings will reward you with quick and vigorous growth.

We planted a large number of trees in two fields. They are both on southerly slopes so we don't have to worry about frost pockets or the damage that can be done by frost. Evergreens are hardy, but they are not indestructible. We took our spades, opened the earth, stuck in the seedling, closed the cut and patted the earth firmly around the transplant. This was good enough, but the fertility of the field is very poor so each spring we go around and sprinkle a balanced fertilizer around each tree, taking care not to get it on the foliage where it can cause burn damage.

When the trees are 2 or 3 feet high (probably after two to four years after transplanting), they should be pruned to achieve that ideal Christmas tree shape.

The first time you prune the tree, start at the bottom and remove any branches that spoil the symmetrical bottom line. You will only have to do this once. Then work your way up the tree, cutting back any branches that are too long. Finally cut back the leader to 8 to 14 inches so it is just big enough to hold the Christmas star. Sometimes after the leader has been pruned the tree will send up a double or triple leader. These should be trimmed back, leaving only the strongest.

Never prune any tree in sub-zero weather, but do shear the spruces and firs when they are not actively growing. Pines must be pruned during their growing season. In our area, mid-June to mid-July would be a good time. Cut back the new growth on the pines about halfway, and this will induce thicker growth the following season. As you prune any evergreen, keep that ideal shape in your mind and sculpt the tree as you go along.

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Wood

By RICHIE DAVIS
Recorder Staff

Heating your home
Burning it down
matter.

Along with an increase in the past 10 years, an increase in misuse, and an increase in Information I

In 1980, according to fires caused by "soot" resulted in 31 from the prior year. Stoves accounted for 16 fires. No fig

Burn injuries number according to and Health.

There are two main is the build-up in soot, a highly complete combustion of unseasoned wood, a

Coal-burn to weigh

By GISELA WALKER
Cooperative Extension

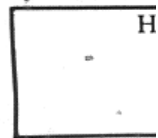
If you are a farmer are considering switching want to go straight to coal — here is before you make an

On the positive side creosote, just some inconveniently than worry about moisture have to feed wood fire.

On the negative side monoxide if burnt Carbon monoxide is as easily detectable percent of the dust from strip mining of

One ton of coal (approximately as much as a seasoned cordwood No. 2 oil and sells for save money burning pound bags in the su

A coal stove, just



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