

2002

# Do You Have Tips On Selecting And Caring For A Christmas Tree?

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## Recommended Citation

Kuhns, Mike, "Do You Have Tips On Selecting And Caring For A Christmas Tree?" (2002). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 357.  
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### A weekly question/answer column

## Do You Have Tips On Selecting And Caring For A Christmas Tree?

*Mike Kuhns\* answers:*

In late November and early December, many Utahns head for their local Christmas tree grower or tree lot to purchase this year's Christmas tree. Selection of a good tree and care for that tree once it is home can help you have a happier and safer holiday season.

- Freshness and moistness are the keys for a Christmas tree that will last through the holiday season. Once needles dry out they usually stay dry, even when the tree is placed in a stand with water. The best way to ensure that your tree is fresh is to buy from a local grower or from a retailer you know and trust, either at a choose-and-cut operation or at a lot.
- Trees shipped into Christmas tree lots from out of state may be fresh, but some may be old and dry. To check for freshness, gently pull on several needles. If many come off, the tree may not be fresh. You can also lift the tree and strike the butt end on the ground. Again, if many needles fall off the twigs, the tree is probably not fresh. Finally, pull off a couple of needles and break them to see if they are moist and fragrant.
- Don't worry about old unattached needles accumulated inside the crown. Though these needles can be messy and a fire hazard, they do not indicate a poor tree and can easily be removed.
- Once a fresh tree is brought home, store it outside with the butt end in water until you are ready to decorate it. Keep it away from sun and wind so it does not dry out. It also helps to re-cut a thin section from the butt end if possible to open the tree's vessels. When you are ready to bring the tree in, cut the butt end again if it has been stored very long.
- Once inside, the tree should be placed in a sturdy stand that holds at least one gallon of water. A fresh tree can lose this much water or more a day, so old fashioned small stands just do not hold enough water. Place the tree away from heaters, furnace vents, televisions and other heat sources.
- Lights on the tree should be UL approved and protected by an inline fuse. Small, pinpoint lights are good because they stay cool. Old lights with cracked insulation or loose sockets should be discarded—don't be sentimental about old Christmas tree lights. Turn lights off when the tree is unattended. Flammable decorations should not be used on a Christmas tree with electric lights. Candles should never be used to light a Christmas tree or wreath.
- A fresh tree that is watered daily can stay moist and safe for several weeks. If a tree is displayed in a public building, it generally should be kept for no more than 15 days and should be treated with a fire retardant solution.

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\* Mike Kuhns is Utah State University Extension Forester