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How to Care for Your Living Christmas Tree

The best strategy for keeping your living Christmas tree alive and well is to keep it cool and well-watered and to limit the amount of time it spends indoors. Here's how to help ensure your Christmas tree will be around next year.

Put the tree in a transition zone. Two weeks before Christmas, put the tree in a garage for about a week to allow for acclimation to an indoor environment.

Keep it watered, but don't overdo it.

Move the tree indoors. A few days before Christmas, move the tree to a spot with filtered light, but well away from drafts and heater vents; a cool location is best. Be sure it gets all the water it needs.

Limit the size of bulbs. Christmas lights don't pose a serious threat to plants; depending on the types of lights and how you use them, however, they can cause some minor damage. Large bulbs can create enough heat to actually burn leaf surfaces, so use only light strands that come with tiny bulbs.

Move the tree back to the garage. A few days after Christmas, put the tree back in the garage. No matter what, don't leave the tree inside the house for more than a week to 10 days.

Plant the tree outdoors. If the ground freezes in your area, consider digging the planting hole in the fall and covering it with leaves. Otherwise, just dig your hole, add amendments to the soil if necessary, plant the tree and water it well. Make sure potted trees are in pots large enough to provide some insulation from the cold, and keep them watered well.



How To Care for your cut Christmas Tree

A Christmas tree is more than just a symbol of the season – it often is the centerpiece of holiday décor. These tips on selecting and caring for a live tree will ensure your season is merry and bright.

Check for Freshness

When you're buying a precut live tree, follow these steps to conduct a freshness inspection:

Check the color. Color should be rich green without a gray or brown tinge.

Exceptions include Colorado blue spruce or juniper – which both have a bluish tinge – and the Southeast's favorite, Leyland cypress – which has a greenish-gray tint.

Take a sniff. A fresh tree should have a pleasant smell and remind you of Christmas.

Grab a branch. Using your thumb and forefinger, hold a branch about 6 inches from the tip. Pull toward you. Fresh needles should spring up behind your fingers and remain attached to the branch.

Pinch a needle. Fresh needles bend; dry ones break.

Bump the trunk. Lift the tree and thump the trunk against the ground. Watch for falling needles. If a few drop, that's fine. Evergreens tend to shed some in autumn, and these needles are often caught on branches.

Home Care

At home, until it's time to decorate, store your tree in an outdoor location protected from freezing temperatures. A shed, porch, or unheated garage works great.

Make the Cut

Before placing your tree in the stand, remove ½ inch from the trunk base. Making a fresh cut is vital because after three to six hours of being exposed to air, a sap layer forms that prevents water absorption. Make a straight cut. Do not cut at an angle or to form a point. These cuts don't enhance water uptake and can make it more difficult to secure the tree in your stand.



Tree Stand Tips

Avoid using a too-small stand. In general, a tree needs 1 quart of water per day per inch of trunk diameter. For a 4-inch trunk, use a tree stand that holds a minimum of 4 quarts (1 gallon) of water. Some sources suggest various solutions to enhance water uptake. The National Christmas Tree Association and Cooperative Extension Service recommend using plain tap water.



Troubleshooting

Expect pre-cut trees to absorb up to one gallon of water in the first 24 hours in the stand. Keep water above the cut end of the trunk to prevent accidentally exposing it to air. If your tree doesn't absorb water, grab a branch to check needles for freshness. Measure a tree's dryness based on the tree itself, not the amount of water in the tree stand. If you cut your own tree (or had it cut for you), it won't absorb water right away because it's fresh from the forest. Real trees don't present a strong fire hazard. Less than 0.0004 percent of live trees used each year ignite in home fires.

Which Tree Lasts Longest?

Different trees retain needles longer than others. Fir and pine hold onto needles longest. Spruces are not as famous for their longevity, but white spruce holds needles longest.



If you have standard 8-foot ceilings and want the tallest Christmas tree your room will allow, you can choose a 7 ½-foot tree and still have a six-inch clearance for your tree stand and topper. A 7 ½-foot Christmas tree is the perfect size for 9-foot ceilings.

How many lights are needed for a 7 foot tree?

A good rule of thumb is 100 lights for every foot-and-a-half of tree. However, if you love lights, you may want to double or even triple that amount.

How many ornaments do you need for a 7 foot tree?

As a general guide, there are two rules to follow. For a tree up to nine feet, use ten ornaments per foot. If the tree is over nine feet, use between twelve to sixteen ornaments per foot.

beloved conifer: the concolor fir

The white, or concolor fir, a Western American native species ranging from Colorado to Southern California, New Mexico and into Mexico, can grow to 100 feet in the wild, apparently, but in a garden setting you are more likely to see it get to 30 or maybe 50 feet in time, and half as wide.

Its long needles, which are particularly silvery-blue in the cultivar 'Candicans,' curve outward and up.

Unlike the Colorado blue spruce, *Picea pungens glauca*, the fir's foliage is soft to the touch, far less stiff. It is also far less trouble-prone than the Colorado blue spruce, which if you've encountered with a case of spruce gall or spider mites or the canker that can affect lower branches, you will know how disfiguring these issues can be. Stated simply: If you want a big blue pyramidal conifer in Zones 4-7 this fir is it (just not in heavy clay, which it apparently will not tolerate).



The concolor fir is a medium growing (12 inches per year) compact evergreen. Its needles are 1 1/2 inches long and are positioned on the topside of the stem and point upwards. They are usually a green blue silver color and when crushed have a smell of citrus or oranges and is quite pleasant. It does not shed its needles but hold them for 10 years or longer, and holds its bottom branches to the ground. It is a native of the high plains, low humidity, rocky mountain areas from New Mexico to Wyoming and commonly grows with the Colorado spruce and Douglas Fir.

The concolor fir has been planted throughout the US and is used mainly for landscaping. Has been planted in the past in windbreaks because of its nice color and availability. This tree needs a well drained soil to do well, in most places east of Nebraska has not done well in the long term for windbreaks as we get too much rain and humidity. When planted on level ground that is not well drained problems occur on wet years. The roots become too saturated and die back occurs and have seen 20 ft tall tree blow over and the root system is very small being only 2ft across. Problems with canker and needlecast diseases can also occur when planted too close in windbreaks restricting sun and wind. For best results plant on a well drained soil and open the spacing up if planting outside its natural Range.



A 2-ft tall-potted tree can be 6 ft tall in 5 years, in well-drained soil with adequate moisture, and weed and grass control around the base of the tree. Spacing--single row 14 ft apart.

Norway Spruce

Norway spruce is one of the most important species on the European Continent. More than 100 forms and varieties have been named. Although not native to the Western hemisphere, the species and a number of its varieties are commonly planted here, particularly in southeastern Canada and northeastern United States. Originally, a number of plants were established as ornamentals, with Christmas tree plantings being established more recently. It has escaped cultivation in several localities and is considered naturalized in some of these areas.



In Europe, Norway spruce grows from 130 to 215 feet in height, but in the United States is seldom more than 130 feet tall. Diameter may reach as much as two feet on older trees. It is readily identified by its dark green needles and drooping branchlets. Trees have dark green crown with a triangular shape. Leaves (needles) are 4-sided (rectangular in section), 1/2-1 inch long, and sharp or somewhat blunt at the tip. At the base of each needle is a twig-like projection (sterigmata) which remains after the needle is lost. Although sometimes confused with true firs (*Abies*), spruces in general have 1) rectangular rather than flat needles, and 2) cones which hang down rather than stand erect on the stem. Additionally, spruce cones fall from the tree after seeds are disseminated, whereas fir cones disintegrate.

Male and female flowers are found on the same tree and are produced in late spring. Norway Spruce produces cones 4-7 inches in length, with wedge-shaped scales. These cones are the largest of any spruce species. Cones mature in one year and ripen from September to November.

The species has a reddish bark, giving it the nickname of "red fir", which flakes off in scales as the tree matures.

The species is adapted to cool, temperate climates. Growth is best in full sunlight in deep, rich, moist soils. It is generally shallow-rooted and does not produce a taproot, thus is subject to being blown over by wind.

Uses:

The wood is strong for its weight, odorless, but slightly resinous and is of importance in the manufacture of pulp and paper. Resinous bark exudations furnish what is known as "Burgundy pitch" which is the basic material for a number of varnishes and medicinal materials. New leafy shoots can be used for brewing spruce beer, although Norway spruce is not as desirable as black or red spruce. The wood has also been used for violin sound boards, but is not the preferred choice.

For Christmas trees, overall color of Norway spruce is fair to excellent, but needle retention is considered poor unless the trees are cut fresh and kept properly watered. Growth during the first 10 years after field planting is relatively slow and 8 to 11 years are required to grow a 6-7 foot tree.



White Pine

Introduction: Eastern white pine's graceful habit and long, evergreen needles give this tree a soft look. It is considered one of the most attractive evergreens and is often planted as an ornamental tree. Although common in the landscape, eastern white pine makes an excellent specimen plant or background plant for smaller trees because of its evergreen foliage.



Culture: This evergreen is an excellent ornamental tree but will not thrive if growing conditions are not optimal. It grows best in fertile, moist, slightly acidic, well-drained soil with full sun. It tolerates some shade but suffers in saturated, hot, dry, infertile, compacted, alkaline or heavy clay soils. These conditions cause a physiological problem on young and recently transplanted trees known as white pine decline. Trees with this condition decline until they have only small clusters of short, stunted needles at their branch ends. White pine is susceptible to damage by road salt, air pollution, wind, ice and snow. It is susceptible to white pine root decline, caused by a fungus, and the potentially lethal white pine blister rust disease. Eradicate gooseberry or wild currant bushes from the planting area as they harbor rust. The list of potential problems includes infestation by white pine weevil, European pine shoot beetle and European pine shoot moth.



Botanical Information

Native habitat: Northeastern U.S., following the Appalachians south.

Growth habit: Pyramidal with tiers of branches coming off the trunk at right angles. With age, the tree becomes flat-topped and has an attractive, characteristic outline.

Tree size: Fast-growing tree, reaching 50 to 80 feet tall in the landscape with a spread of 20 to 40 feet. Can exceed 150 feet tall in the wild.

Flower and fruit: Monoecious; male flowers are yellow and clustered; female flowers are pink. Ornamental, 3- to 7-inch-long hanging cones are pale brown at maturity and very resinous. Leaf - Long (4-inch), blue-green needles, soft, flexible and grouped in fives. The aromatic needles usually drop after two or three years after they turn yellow in early fall.

Hardiness: Winter hardy to USDA Zone 3. planting area as they harbor rust. The list of potential problems includes infestation by white pine weevil, European pine shoot beetle and European pine shoot moth.



MATERIALS TO MAKE A FISH BOWL SNOWMAN

3 different sized fish bowls that stack.

I got these at Michael's, but I've seen smaller versions at the dollar store!

Snow village pieces. every craft store has all of their Christmas supplies out right now, including everything you'd need to create a little snow village. Or, you can always pick them out online

1 bag of fake snow.

2 sheets of black craft foam

Scissors

Christmas ribbon for around the snowman's top hat

Glue gun

1. Put a little fake snow at the bottom of each bowl.

2. Arrange your various snow village pieces to make a special scene! I found a small house at Michaels, so I placed a flameless candle inside of it.

3. To make the snowman's top hat, you will need to trace a circle in the black craft foam that is slightly larger than the opening of your smallest fish bowl on top. I used a round Tupperware lid as a guide! Use a bowl or anything around your house to do this. Next, determine how tall the hat needs to be on top of the circle base you cut. Using the black craft foam, cut a rectangle that rolls into a cylinder. Hot glue the edges of the rectangle together to make a cylinder. Next, cut a small circle out and glue it to the top of the hat. Finally, embellish the top hat with some Christmas ribbon!



Deodar Cedar Adds Grace to Landscape

The Deodar cedar, *Cedrus deodara*, is one of the most graceful cedars, especially in youth, and has become a favorite among homeowners and landscapers. The tree is broadly pyramidal with graceful pendulous branches that become wide-spreading and flat-topped in old age.

The tree's fine, textured foliage ranges from light blue to grayish green to silvery in color. The cones are 3 to 4 inches long by approximately 3 inches broad on short branchlets. The Deodar grows about 2 feet in a year when young. If root pruned, the Deodar transplants easily. The tree prefers a well drained, somewhat dry, sunny location and protection from sweeping winds.

Due to its fine, textured foliage, Deodar cedar allows light and water to penetrate the grass or groundcovers that grow below. The few needles that drop are easy to clean up. You don't have to worry about solid mats of fallen leaves that may threaten to smother other plants. Deodar cedar is a good substitute for the white pine.



Kashmir Deodar Cedar will grow to be about 70 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 60 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 5 feet from the ground, and should not be planted underneath power lines. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 80 years or more.

This tree should only be grown in full sunlight. It is very adaptable to both dry and moist growing conditions, but will not tolerate any standing water. It is not particular as to soil type or pH. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution, and will benefit from being planted in a relatively sheltered



location. This is a selected variety of a species not originally from North America.

Garden Size: 25'H x 15'W

Large: 15+?/year

Broad Upright



Northern Cardinal Facts

Cardinals get their bright colors from the pigments found in berries and other plant materials in their diet. Pairs of male and female cardinals remain with each other year round.

Pairs usually do not stray very far from each other. Female cardinals are responsible for building the nests. Cardinals will usually build the nests from twigs, pine needles, grass, and other plant material.

Cardinal eggs have an incubation period of 11 to 13 days.

During the incubation period, the female cardinal will stay with the eggs and the male will bring her food.

Cardinals will breed 2 or 3 times per summer.

They will usually drive their chicks away 10 days after hatching.

Male cardinals molt in early fall after the breeding season is over.

Both male and female cardinals otherwise maintain their bright color throughout the year.

Cardinals are not found often in forests. They prefer the edges of forests and grassland landscapes with thickets and shrubbery they can hide and nest in.

Cardinals are fiercely territorial during the breeding season of May through August, but during the winter months when food is scarce they may flock together around a food source.

An average cardinal measures about 8 inches in length.

The cardinal is a very popular bird, and has been named the state bird of 7 states: Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, *Virginia*, and West Virginia.



Cotoneasters

Common Name: rock cotoneaster
Type: Deciduous shrub
Family: Rosaceae
Native Range: Western China
Zone: 4 to 7
Height: 1.00 to 1.50 feet
Spread: 5.00 to 8.00 feet
Bloom Time: May to June
Bloom Description: Pale pink
Sun: Full sun to part shade
Water: Medium
Maintenance: Low
Suggested Use: Ground Cover
Flower: Showy
Leaf: Good Fall
Attracts: Birds
Fruit: Showy
Other: Winter Interest
Tolerate: Rabbit, Drought, Erosion, Air Pollution



Culture

Best grown in moist, loamy, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. Good drainage is important. This is a tough and adaptable plant that can withstand considerable poor soils. Established plants tolerate drought. Container-grown plants may be spaced 4-5' apart for mass plantings. Easiest propagation is by stem cuttings. If correctly sited, plants may require little pruning. Plants dislike hot summer conditions and often struggle south of USDA Zone 7.

Cotoneaster horizontalis, commonly called rockspray cotoneaster, is a coarse, dense, slow-growing, semi-prostrate shrub that grows to 2-3' tall and spreads over time to 6-8' wide on stiff, flattened, horizontal branching that features branchlets arranged in fishbone patterns. Branching becomes somewhat tiered over time. Plants are deciduous in the northern parts of their growing range, but semi-evergreen in the far southern locations. Round to elliptic, glossy dark green leaves (to 1/2"



long) are attractive throughout the growing season.

Leaves on deciduous plants turn reddish-purple in fall.

Five-petaled, tiny pink flowers appear singly or in pairs in late spring. Bees are attracted to the flowers.

Flowers are followed by bright scarlet fruits (1/4" wide) that mature in late summer to fall.

Genus name comes from the Latin words *cotoneum* meaning quince and *-aster* meaning resembling.

Specific epithet means flat to the ground.

Pine Cone Cheese Ball

"Any cheese ball is a welcome addition to a holiday party spread, but when you bring one that looks like a pine cone, you're talking about a real showstopper."

2 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese,
Softened

4 ounces goat cheese, softened

3 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf
Parsley

2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

1/2 clove garlic, minced, or more to taste

1 pinch cayenne pepper, or to taste

salt and ground black pepper to taste

1 cup whole almonds, or as needed

3 large fresh rosemary sprigs

Directions Prep 30 min Ready in 30 min

Stir cream cheese, goat cheese, parsley, tarragon, thyme, garlic, cayenne pepper, salt, and black pepper together in a bowl until smooth and well-mixed.

Turn cheese mixture out onto a serving platter and form into a tapered oval shape to resemble a pine cone.

Starting at the tapered end, press almonds into the cheese cone so that the tip of the almond is facing out and down, and cheese cone is completely covered with almonds and resembles a pine cone.

Place rosemary sprigs at the top to resemble pine needles.



Strawberries & whipped cream



Holiday Hustler Cocktail {with Peppermint Irish Cream}

Prep Time 5 mins

Total Time 5 mins

This Holiday Hustler Cocktail is smooth, creamy and tastes exactly like the inside of an Andy's mint. It's gorgeous color makes it perfect to serve to the adults at your Christmas gathering!

Ingredients

2 ounces Saint Brendan's Peppermint Bark Irish Cream

1 ounce Green Crème de Menthe

½ ounce Chocolate Hazelnut Vodka

3 ounces Original Almond Milk

1 cup Ice

Mint Sprig for garnish

Instructions

Place all ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth.

Pour into desired glass and garnish with mint sprig.

Optional - top with whipped cream and crushed candy canes.

Recipe Notes



Directions:

Butter Grog, A German Christmas Drink

Tip: To make this Butter Grog an alcoholic drink, simply replace the rum extract with 3-4 oz of your favorite rum.

Ingredients:

- 1-1/2 Tbsp butter
- 4 cups apple cider
- 1 Tbsp brown sugar
- 4 whole cloves
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- Peel from 1 lemon
- Peel and juice from 1 orange
- 1" piece ginger root, sliced
- 2 tsp rum extract/or Rum



1. Melt the butter in a medium-size saucepan. Add the cider, brown sugar, cloves, cinnamon, lemon and orange peels, orange juice, and ginger. Bring the liquid to a simmer, and then remove pan from the heat. Add the rum extract. Let the mixture steep for at least 30 minutes. Strain and reheat to serve warm.

Christmas lantern ideas





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