

Tree tips: Proper handling and care will keep it fresh

BY PAUL R. HUARD
Copley News Service

O, Christmas tree, you are not going out of fashion.

Green and lovely, smelling to high heavens of pine or fir or spruce, fresh-cut trees remain the most popular way to green up a home. Providing the right care for the tree will keep it perky even into the New Year.

Despite a deluge of imported artificial trees, sales of the real thing were solid during the 2004 Christmas season, said Irwin Loiterstein, a spokesman for the National Christmas Tree Association. He said consumers purchased 3.7 million more real trees than the previous year.

"Consumers are obviously demanding more of the traditional, farm-grown, natural trees instead of the fake ones from China, and there are indications that growers will be able to increase the supply of real Christmas trees to meet this demand," Loiterstein says.

One tree grower says that many parents seeing buying a Christmas tree as one of the few truly family events that take place during the holiday.

"More parents are looking for the old-fashioned tree farm with the 'Norman Rockwell' experience," said Jane Battles, co-owner with her husband Ramon of Tower-n-Pines Farm, Chesterland, Ohio. "One parent insisted, 'I want my children to participate in the fun of finding a tree with the

family.' That's the memory that will last forever."

How to care for the tree is a matter of following some important care tips. When a Christmas tree is cut, over half of its weight is water, but with proper care and plenty of water you can maintain the quality of the greenery.

TREE TIPS

■ In selecting a tree, make sure that the "handle" at the bottom is long enough to allow the trunk to fit into your tree stand. Otherwise, it will be necessary to remove large branches near the base, which could ruin its appearance.

■ Make a fresh cut to remove a half-inch to one-inch disk of wood from the base of the trunk before putting the tree in the stand. Make the cut perpendicular to the stem axis. Don't cut the trunk at an angle, or into a V-shape, which makes it far more difficult to hold the tree in the stand and also reduces the amount of water available to the tree. If you use a "center pin" stand, make sure the hole is drilled in the stem after it is trimmed.

■ Once home, place the tree in water as soon as possible. Most species can go 6-8 hours after cutting the trunk and still take up water. Don't bruise the cut surface or get it dirty.

■ If needed, trees can be temporarily stored for several days in a cool location. Place the freshly cut trunk in a bucket that is kept full

of water. The tree may need to be supported in some manner to keep it from tipping over.

■ To display the trees indoors, use a stand with an adequate water holding capacity for the tree. As a general rule, stands should provide 1 quart of water per inch of stem diameter. Devices are available that help maintain a constant water level in the stand.

■ Use a stand that fits your tree. Some stands have circular rings at the top, so the ring must be large enough for the trunk to go through the hole. Other stands are open, which may allow a greater range in trunk size. Avoid whittling the sides of the trunk down to fit a stand. The outer layers of wood are the most efficient in taking up water and should not be removed.

■ Keep displayed trees away from sources of heat (fireplaces, heaters, heat vents, and direct sunlight). Lowering the room temperature will slow the drying process, resulting in less water consumption each day. The temperature of the water used to fill the stand is not important and does not affect water uptake.

■ Check the stand daily to make sure that the level of water does not go below the base of the tree. With many stands, there can still be water in the stand even though the base of the tree is no longer submerged in water.

■ Do not use additives in the water, including floral

preservatives, commercial tree preservatives, molasses, sugar, bleach, soft drinks, aspirin, honey and other concoctions. Clean water is all that is needed to maintain freshness.

■ Use of miniature lights

will produce much less heat and reduce drying of the tree.

■ Always inspect light sets prior to placing them on the tree. If worn, replace with a new set.

■ Do not overload electrical circuits.

■ Always turn off the lights when leaving the house or when going to bed.

■ Monitor the tree for freshness. After Christmas or if the tree is dry, remove it from the house.

CHRISTMAS FACTS

Trim that tree

Do you have enough decorations for your Christmas tree? Or do you think you may have gone overboard? Here's a good rule of thumb on what's recommended for the tree, mantle and beyond:

Area to decorate	Feet of garland
Regular doorway	18' to 25'
Double doorway	20' to 35'
Small picture window	18' to 25'
Large picture window	20' to 35'
Fireplace mantle	18' to 25'
Ceiling decorations	50' to 100'

Tree height	# of miniature lights	Feet of garland	Novelty tree trim/ornaments
2'	35 to 40	2' to 3'	30 pieces
3'	70 to 80	3 to 4'	42 pieces
4'	200 to 400	5' to 5.5'	35-50 pieces
6'	400 to 600	8.5' to 9'	50-75 pieces
7'	500 to 700	10' to 11'	75-100 pieces
8'	600 to 800	13' to 14.5'	175-225 pieces

SOURCE: Brommer's Christmas Store, Frankenmuth, MI

Copley News Service / Paul Ho

Look at this year's holiday music

BY NEKESA MUMBI MOODY
AP Music Writer

It's hard to put a new spin on holiday classics like "Jingle Bells" or "Silent Night." Yet every year, several artists try, hoping their rendition may stand out from the crowd and become part of the Christmas musical canon.

A few notable albums from this year's hopefuls:

Anita Baker, "Christmas Fantasy" — The husky-voiced R&B diva brings her sensual tone to classics ranging from "O Come All Ye Faithful" to "I'll Be Home for Christmas."

Brian Wilson, "What I Really Want For Christmas" — One of the most melodic rockers takes on melodies including "Silent Night" and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."

Jane Monheit, "This Season" — The jazz siren with the lush pipes covers traditional songs like "Have a Merry Little Christmas" and "This Christmas."

Martha Stewart, "The Holiday Collection" — Can she get any more overexposed? The recently freed felon, who seems to be making up for lost time with two TV talk shows and a host of new products, puts out this three-disc box set. Thankfully, she doesn't sing. Instead, she selects the best holi-

day music for your soiree, from traditional pop to jazz to classical. And of course, there are recipes and tips to make your own decorations.

Diana Krall, "Christmas Songs" — Just the cover, which features Krall leaning back in a sexy pose, gives you an idea of the mood the album inspires. Seductive and sassy, Krall is joined here by the Clayton/Hamilton Jazz Orchestra.

The LeeVees, "Hanukkah Rocks" — Plenty of humor, with tracks like "Jewish Girls (at the Matzoh Ball)" and "At the Timeshare."

Various Artists, "A John Waters Christmas" — Anyone who picks up a Christmas album with an "explicit lyrics" tag on it probably isn't worried about offending anyone. In fact, that may be the goal. If so, this Christmas CD from director John Waters will more than deliver, with songs like "Happy Birthday Jesus," "Santa Claus Is a Black Man," and "Little Mary Christmas."

Yourself, "U Sing It Christmas" — Hey, why should those "American Idol" kids have all the fun? This album lets you sing Christmas classics and have an instant karaoke party. Pop it into your computer, sing and e-mail it to the universe for a laugh — or to become the next Nat King Cole.

Live designer tree debuts

The world's first live designer Christmas tree is here. The Oregon's Noble Vintage designer tree debuted last holiday season in limited supply to the East Coast, but this season, the designer tree has moved to all the way west to California and states in-between.

Raised in the wine coun-

try of Oregon's Willamette Valley, the Oregon's Noble Vintage is a stunning blue-green fir with soft upturned needles and stiff branches. Grown under strict supervision and to the exacting standards of expert growers with more than 100 years experience, each Oregon's Noble Vintage tree has been nurtured for an average of 10 years.

The trees are hand selected, then carefully

packaged and transported in temperature-controlled trucks to preserve its farm freshness. A specially designed hang-tag tied with a gold ribbon is a stamp of authenticity, distinguishing each Oregon Noble Vintage tree.

"Finding that special Christmas tree is a very personal tradition that evokes emotions passed through generations," said Joseph Sharp of Yule Tree Farms. "The Oregon's

Noble Vintage designer Christmas tree is an original breed with a majestic look, fragrance and freshness."

Available in a range of sizes, from grand 9-foot trees to light up a living room to tiny tabletop trees, the Oregon Noble Vintage is available by reservation and through select retailers.

For more information, visit www.oregonsnoble.com or call (877) 487-7282. (CNS)



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