

The following and additional information can be found at <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1996/11-8-1996/cmtree.html>, or by following the link on Knollwood's Link page.

Last updated 1/13/98 by [John VanDyk](#)
<http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1996/11-8-1996/cmtree.html>

Live Christmas Trees

For many individuals, planting a live Christmas tree into the landscape after the holidays has a special appeal. Unfortunately, planting evergreens in winter is a difficult proposition. Our harsh, winter weather (extreme cold, rapidly fluctuating temperatures, and dry winds) is often too much for the tree to endure.

If you are considering a live tree for Christmas, proper preparation and care of the tree are essential. Transplanting success can be increased by following the steps outlined below.

1. Choose a suitable planting site for the tree in the fall. The site should provide adequate space for the tree to grow and develop.
2. Prepare the planting site in the fall before the ground freezes. Remove the soil and place in a warm location. Fill the hole with straw.
3. Select a healthy tree from a local nursery or garden center. When purchasing a balled and burlapped tree, choose a tree with a solid soil ball. A small tree is less expensive and easier to handle. (The size and weight of a large tree can make lugging the tree into the house and through doorways a real challenge.) A small tree also has a much better chance of survival.
4. Store the tree in a cool garage, shed, or porch if it is purchased two or three weeks before Christmas. Make sure the soil ball is kept moist, but does not freeze. If the temperature in the storage area may drop below freezing, place straw or other insulating materials around the soil ball to prevent it from freezing.
5. Before bringing a balled and burlapped tree indoors, wrap the soil ball in plastic or place it in a tub. Place the tree in a cool location within the home. Avoid sites near heat sources, such as a fireplace, registers, etc.
6. The tree should be kept indoors for only a short period. The shorter the tree's stay indoors, the better its chances of survival when planted outdoors. The maximum stay indoors should be 7 to 10 days. If the tree is kept indoors for a longer period, the buds may break dormancy. When planted outdoors, the succulent new growth will be killed by cold temperatures.
7. Carefully decorate the tree. Ornaments, tinsel, and lights (preferably the miniature types) can be used. Don't apply flocking or artificial snow to the tree.
8. Keep the soil ball moist throughout the tree's stay indoors. Check the soil daily and water as needed.
9. Shortly after Christmas, remove the tree from the house and place it in a cool location. (Don't place the tree directly outdoors. The sharply colder temperatures outdoors may injure the tree.) A brief stay in a cool garage, shed, etc., allows the tree to become gradually acclimated to cooler temperatures. The soil ball should not be allowed to freeze during this period.
10. On a relatively mild winter day, remove the straw from the planting area and plant the tree outdoors. Water well and mulch the area heavily to prevent the soil from freezing immediately.

Home gardeners should carefully consider the requirements and risks associated with a live Christmas tree. An evergreen can be successfully planted outdoors after the holidays. However, proper site preparation and good tree care are essential.

This article originally appeared in the November 8, 1996 issue, p. 169.

