

# KEEPING YOUR REAL CHRISTMAS TREE FRESH AND SAFE

The real Christmas trees are back! Fresh Christmas trees are popping up for sale all over the county under tents and canopies. The National Christmas Tree Association indicates that more than 30-million families will pick out and enjoy a cut tree this year. In order to enjoy your tree for the maximum amount of time, take some extra effort to select a good tree and provide proper after-care.

Before you is a sea of trees - how do you pick out a good one? Ask the dealer when they get trees in. Is there just one shipment for the season or multiple deliveries? A tree that has just recently arrived will most likely be freshly cut. Beyond symmetry, size and color, give your selection the freshness test. A fresh tree will have green needles that snap like a fresh carrot when bent between your fingers. Take hold of a branch and give it a gentle pull. A minimum of needles should fall out in your hand. Next, give the tree a firm shake. Again, you are looking for very few green needles dropping off. Also look for trees that do not have discolored foliage, wrinkled bark, or a musty or moldy odor. If you can't find a suitably fresh tree, perhaps try another dealer.

*(Continued on page 2)*



<http://okeechobee.ifas.ufl.edu>

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November 24, 2009

Once the tree has been brought home, store it temporarily in a cool, shaded spot out of the wind. Just before you set the tree in the stand, make a fresh cut on the base of the tree. This cut should remove about a half-inch from the trunk base. This will re-open the tree's ability to uptake water and distribute it to all parts of the tree. Make sure that the stand will hold a gallon of water or more. In the next 24 hour period, the tree may absorb a gallon of water. Water is the key to keeping the tree hydrated and fragrant. Replace water in the stand as necessary. Several quarts of water per day may need to be added. Stands should have the ability to provide one quart of water per inch of stem diameter. If the water drops below the butt level, the cut end may seal over and dry up. Make another fresh cut if this happens before replacing the water.

*For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant Allison Turner at 764.4351 or email [Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com](mailto:Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com).*

*Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.*

### **CONTACT A MASTER GARDENER**

**on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-4:00pm  
Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at  
764.4340 or by email  
[Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).**

**You can also visit them at one of our many  
Plant Clinics around the county:  
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>**

Common sense will also tell you to keep the tree away from heat sources. Make sure that your light set cords and connections are in good condition. Never use cracked insulation, damaged or empty sockets. Make sure to never overload electrical circuits. Always make sure to unplug lights before you go to bed, when the tree is unattended, and when you leave the house. Use miniature lights that produce low heat to reduce drying out the tree.

One final big question about keeping cut Christmas trees is what to put into the water. I've seen various studies on water additives, and as the National Christmas Tree Association highlights, people have tried aspirin, bleach, fertilizer, etc. However, the very best additive for Christmas tree stand water is plain water. If a tree has been properly selected, the butt re-cut, and sufficient water is available in the reservoir, and of course the tree is fully hydrated, your tree should be in good condition. Check out the National Christmas Tree Association website for more details [www.christmastree.org](http://www.christmastree.org).

#### **Resources:**

- National Christmas Tree Association (2001) - *Selecting & Caring for Your Real Tree/Watering Your Real Tree.*
- Dungey, R. (2009) - *10 "Quick" Tips On Selecting A Tree At A Retail Lot.* National Christmas Tree Association.
- Chatagner, G. & Hinesley, E. (2009) - *How to Care for Your Farm-Grown Fresh Christmas Tree.* National Christmas Tree Association.
- Dungey, R. (2009) - *Frequently Asked Questions.* National Christmas Tree Association.

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