

HOLIDAY PLANT PURCHASING TIPS

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Poinsettias and fresh-cut Christmas trees are "must-have" items during the Holiday season. The beauty of these horticultural wonders adds color and a festive décor to the home. Picking out the best poinsettia and Christmas tree is important to ensure the longest lasting living product.

There is literally a sea of poinsettias at garden centers and supermarkets and to wade through them in search of the perfect plant can be daunting. I want you to arrive at the store armed with some discerning information on what to look for. For instance, select a plant which has green foliage nearly to the soil line. Older plants have dropped many of their leaves leaving a somewhat bare lower portion. Keep in mind that dropping

Poinsettia



www.wikipedia.com

foliage can also be associated with temperature changes, gas fumes, soil problems, and even plant pests. Inspect the leaves carefully to make sure that pests such as white flies are not present - you do not want to accidentally introduce whiteflies into your other plants! Once you have the poinsettia home, keeping it in a cooler place at night has been shown to extend their vibrant quality longer.

The colorful portions of the poinsettia are called bracts. Bracts are not the true flower, but are the most colorful, showy portion of the plant. These bracts should be large, brilliant in color, unblemished and extend over the green leaves below. Keep in mind that there is now a large selection of poinsettia colors to choose from in addition to the classic red including shades of white, pink, color combinations and variegations, and even a plum color.

A final poinsettia selecting tip would include selecting plants that have small tight green button-like flower parts (the true flowers) in the center of the bracts. These true flowers will eventually open and if the poinsettia is already producing pollen at the time of sale, the bracts will tend to fade sooner.

The Christmas tree tents are up and fresh-cut conifers of various varieties are for sale. I've summarized some suggestions provided by the National Christmas Tree Association on picking out that perfect Christmas tree.

Do some homework prior to your purchase. First, before you step out your door, make sure that you know the size (height and width) of the Christmas tree you need. Also, be familiar with the various species of Christmas trees offered. You can check out the NCTA website at www.realchristmastrees.org to look over the different species popular in our area.

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Select a retail tent that has good lighting so that you get a good view of the trees, and displays and stores its trees in a suitable nature. If you obtain a tree soon after it arrives at the tent, it will very likely be fresh and recently cut. As a good informed consumer, you should ask the salesperson where the trees are from, and is there only one shipment or several expected through Christmas.

Once you begin to examine the various trees for sale, conduct a freshness test on the trees. The green needles on a fresh fir tree will break crisply (just like a carrot) when bent sharply with the fingers. Pines should be examined a little differently because their needles are more fibrous than firs. Only dry pine needles break.

Excessive needle loss, discolored foliage, musty odor, needle pliability, and wrinkled bark are indicators of dryness or deterioration. If one tree looks questionable, check another one out. If all of the trees fail the freshness test, check out another retail Christmas tree tent.

Some types of Christmas trees simply last longer and keep fresher than others; especially in our climate. You may want to ask the retailer for some suggestions on which species does best here. Also ask about Christmas tree recycling programs in your community.

Picking out the annual Christmas tree is a real tradition, so make sure to involve the whole family!

While there are certainly many other traditional Holiday plants available at this time of year, poinsettias and fresh cut Christmas trees are favorites. Make a fresh selection and enjoy these plants through the season!

Resource:

-Culbert, D.F. (2001) Why Poinsettias? UF/IFAS Extension Service.

National Christmas Tree Association (2005) 10 "Quick" Tips on Selecting a Tree at a Retail Lot. www.christmastree.org/selection.cfm.

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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. 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.

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



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