

## A season rich with tradition

Christmas trees stand out as an ancient symbol, linking us to nature. For many years we have continued this tradition with cut Christmas trees. Recently, people have begun bringing living trees into their homes to decorate. It is a way to say they believe in the future and in caring for the earth.

## Choosing a living Christmas tree

If you choose to decorate a live tree for the holidays, it is critical to note that **the tree can be indoors for only seven days**. Please refer to the box marked "Bringing your tree indoors" for proper instruction.

In choosing a living Christmas tree, think first about how you would like to care for your tree in the seasons ahead. Are you planning to plant it in the ground this winter? Alternatively, would you like to keep it in the same container, bringing it back inside in future years? If you want to plant the tree this winter or spring, you may choose any kind of tree. However only certain kinds of trees will survive container life. The following paragraphs give more details to help you make your decision.

## Long term container trees

Dwarf conifers are well suited to containers because they grow so slowly. In addition, pines are especially suited to life in a container for several years. The following list provides some ideas for dwarf conifers and pines for long term container plants.

*Chamecyparis obtusa* 'Gracilis'- Grows 6-12"/year. Matures at 30' tall.

*Chamecyparis obt.* 'Compacta'- 3-6"/year to 10'+.

*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Black Dragon'- Slow growing to 8-10' +, conical habit.

*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Elegans Compacta'- Grows 3-6"/year. Matures at 6-12' tall.

*Picea glauca* 'Conica', Dwarf Alberta spruce- Grows 3-6"/year. Matures at 8-12'

*Picea sitchensis* 'Papoose'- Dense, egg shaped shrub, grows 1-4"/year.

*Pinus artistata*, Bristlecone pine- Grows 3-6"/year. Matures at 10'+.

*Sciadopitys verticillata*, Umbrella Pine. – Grows 6-12"/year. Matures at 25'+.

In addition, tropical evergreens such as Norfolk Island Pine can remain potted and indoors their whole life.

## Short-term container trees (two years or less)

Larger (and thus faster growing) conifers such as Douglas fir, true cedars, and cypress (*Pseudotsuga*, *Cedrus*, *Chamaecyparis*, *Cupressus*) can be kept in the same container for only a few years. At that time they must be repotted into a larger container, or preferably planted in the ground. Should you wish to use the same container, root pruning in early spring can help achieve this desire.

Spruces (*Picea*), such as Colorado blue or Norway, can stay in a pot for a year before they need to go in the ground. It is feasible to use the same spruce for two Christmases. Keep in mind that spruces, except for dwarfs, grow to be 60'+.

## One year Christmas trees

The classic Christmas trees such as Noble fir and Grand fir (*Abies procera*,

*Abies grandis*) can only be used for one Christmas before they need to go directly into the ground. Minimize transplant shock by planting these trees before spring rolls into summer. Again, please keep in mind that these trees can grow very large (60-90') and live for a hundred or more years.

## Bringing your tree indoors.

This section is very important! Please read and follow directions thoroughly. Your tree could die and drop all its needles if it is brought directly into the house from outdoors. **Plan to keep your tree indoors for only seven days or less.**

Acclimate your tree to warmer temperatures by keeping it on the porch, unheated garage or some sheltered area for three to five days. After this period, you can bring the tree indoors to a cool spot in the house. Choose a place that is away from heating vents, very sunny windows, wood stoves etc. If you use Christmas lights, use only small, cool burning bulbs.

Do not forget a saucer to protect your floors. Ice cubes are an ideal way to water the tree and keep the root ball cool. A cool air humidifier placed nearby will help keep the air moist and cool around the tree.

After the holiday (and seven-day period) remember to recondition your tree to outdoor temperatures. This means putting the tree back on the porch or in the garage for three to seven days. After this period, the tree can go out into the yard, or in the ground. If you plan to keep the tree in a container for several years, it may be best to keep it in a spot sheltered from the strong winds and hard freezing.

## Caring for your Container tree

### Size of container

When deciding the size of container consider the size of the plant currently, the eventual size of the plant, and of course, how much space you have at home. The plant you choose will need some room in the pot to grow in order to thrive. The pot should be at least 6" larger in all directions than the current root ball. The plant may need to be up potted or root pruned in future years to maintain a healthy specimen. If a pot is greatly larger than the current root ball there may be watering challenges. Please see below for further details.

### Watering

All container plants require more water than the same plant in the ground. In the hot summer months, the container may need to be watered every day depending on the size of the pot. If a small plant is placed in a very large container, it can be difficult to keep the actual root ball wet. Take extra care to moisten the root zone and not just the excess potting soil. If the tree is in the ground water once a week at a slow trickle for at least one hour.

### Soil and Fertilizer

We recommend any potting soil for container plants because it offers the best drainage. Container trees only need to be fertilized once a year in the spring with an all-purpose fertilizer.

## Planting in the Ground

Dig a hole twice as wide and a little deeper than the current pot. Fill the hole with water, and allow to drain if the soil is dry. Add 1/3 compost to the existing soil, and fill soil. You can add a handful of bone meal or rock phosphate to encourage root development. Gently lower the tree into the hole, and fill half way with compost and soil mix. Next, remove the burlap from around the trunk. You do not need to remove the burlap completely. You can just fold it down, and then fill the rest of the hole with your soil mixture. The burlap will decompose. If you have a container tree, please ignore this last step. Water thoroughly.



Compiled by Laura Altwater

Living Christmas Trees

## A Living Tradition



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Live Christmas Trees