

Holiday Horticulture
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I recently saw the following list in an email from the National Gardening Bureau. I thought it might be fun to share the list of what gardeners are thankful for.

Gardeners are thankful for...

- ...the flower and vegetable companies who continue bringing us new and improved varieties.
- ...the catalogers and mail-order companies who send us their tomes of tempting catalogues.
- ...the retailers who know what will grow in our area and stock them at the appropriate time.
- ...the garden supply companies who create new and innovative products.
- ...the patient horticulture experts who tirelessly answer questions so we can be more successful.
- ...the garden writers and bloggers who offer inspiration and advice that keeps us dreaming.
- ...our families for having the patience to put up with our many failed attempts at gardening.
- ...our friends who "ooh and aah" over our gardens no matter how many weeds we forgot to pull.
- ...our bosses and co-workers who put up with our Monday-morning aches and pains.
- ...the sun, the rain, the change of seasons, the cool temps, and everything else nature provides.

Many species of trees are harvested for Christmas tree use. Some of these include Scotch pine, white pine, Fraser fir, Norway (or red) pine, and balsam fir. Scotch pine is dark green in color with twisted needles born in clusters of two. White pine has soft flexible needles, is very fragrant and blue green in color. Needle length is medium and arranged in five needles per bundle. Fraser fir has short, dark green needles and a very traditional Christmas tree shape. Norway pines have long coarse needles arranged two per bundle. These trees tend to have a more open growth habit and retain needles well. Balsam fir has needles that are similar to Fraser fir with rounded needle tips. These trees retain needles well and are a fairly dense tree. Of course we should not leave out ponderosa pine, which is the native pine to the Black Hills.

Over half of the weight of a tree is water; with proper care you should be able to extend the freshness of your tree throughout the holiday season. The following tree freshness tips are complements of the National Christmas Tree Association:

1. Display trees in water to increase freshness and minimize needle loss.
2. Cut a one inch thick disk of wood from the base of the trunk before placing in the stand. Make a perpendicular straight cut (not angled or v-shaped) to the stem axis.
3. Place tree in water as soon as possible or within eight hours of cutting the stem.
4. Use a stand that will hold at least one quart of water per inch of trunk diameter.
5. Use a stand that fits the tree. Do not whittle the sides of the trunk to make it fit. The most efficient water carrying cells (xylem tissues) are immediately under the bark.
6. Display your tree away from heat sources (fireplaces, heaters, heat vents, direct sunlight, and even your television) to reduce the amount of water that transpires from the needle surface. Lowering the room temperature will help too.
7. The temperature of the water you use has no effect on water uptake into the tree.
8. Do not allow the water in the stand to fall below the cut edge of the tree trunk.
9. Do not add water holding gels to the stand. These will only lower the amount of water available to the tree.
10. Do not use additives in the water, including floral preservatives, commercial preservative or homemade concoctions. Clean water is all the tree needs.
11. Use www.christmastree.org to search for tree recycling options by zip code.
12. Never burn your tree in a fireplace or wood stove as conifers (especially dry ones) can burn very uncontrollably and can pose an explosive fire hazard.

If you have questions about this article or other horticultural topics feel free to call on me at 605-394-2188 or e-mail to ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu.