

**Bring the Outdoors Indoors for a Season**  
**Rick Abrahamson**  
**Week of November**

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.

Christmas trees can be purchased from not-for-profit organizations, garden centers, individual entrepreneurs, or even at a cut-your-own grower operation. Any of these retail outlets can be beneficial to you, depending on the level of service you desire or your individual preference. I also recently saw that you can purchase a permit to harvest your own in the Black Hills. Harvesting your own tree can be a very rewarding family activity the weekend after Thanksgiving.

Many trees sold in tree lots are cut several weeks in advance and tend to dry out more than freshly cut trees. Also, I think this year may prove to be a dry tree year given the mild temperatures we have experienced this fall. Many trees may have lost water during the delivery process. When selecting a tree, bend a needle or thump the base. A bent needle should spring back and not break. Thumping a tree against the ground should yield few needles.

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 <http://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.

Consider placing your used tree outside as a shelter for birds and other animals through the rest of the winter.

More information on horticultural topics can be found by visiting us online 24 hours a day at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html> or by calling the Pennington County Extension office at 605-394-2188 or by email to [ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu](mailto:ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu).