



Great Places

Green Spaces

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Key topics: Christmas and Winter tree maintenance

By John Hartland

The classic Christmas tree most people picture in their head is a fir tree. There are several great options that have strong branches for ornaments and lights and the right fragrance that seems to invoke some Christmas nostalgia. The firs you can keep your eye out for are Balsam Fir, Fraser Fir, Grand Fir, Noble Fir, and Concolor Fir. The main difference between the aforementioned firs is primarily aesthetics and availability.

The next well known Christmas tree variety is a classic pine tree. Pine trees are typically not as fragrant and do not have very strong branches for large ornaments. The most commonly available pine trees are White Pine, Scotch Pine, and Austrian Pine. Ponderosa Pine is not commonly used as a Christmas tree.

The final variety of Christmas tree commonly available in South Dakota is the spruce tree. Spruce trees typically have strong enough branches for most ornaments and lights, paired with a strong, but not overwhelming, fragrance. The most commonly available spruce are Colorado Blue Spruce, Norway Spruce, and Black Hills Spruce.

If you are feeling a little non-traditional, another option is the Eastern Red Cedar. This tree grows almost everywhere in South Dakota and typically has good form, strong fragrance, and the branches can hold most ornaments.



THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

Source: whychristmas.com/customs/christmas-trees

"You know me. I think there ought to be a big, old tree right there. And lets give him a friend. Everybody needs a friend." - Bob Ross.



Christmas Tree Time!

History of the Christmas Tree

Christmas trees are believed to have originated in 16th century Germany and the first Christmas tree was lit with candles by Martin Luther.

Unsurprisingly, Christmas trees first appeared in America in the 1700's in areas settled by German immigrants. Americans were extremely hesitant to the concept of Christmas trees. Some mayors even made it a legal offense to erect decorations. Eventually in 1846, an illustration was released depicting popular, royal figures all gathered around a Christmas tree. This instantly caused an uptick in Christmas tree popularity in America, and by the 1890's Christmas tree ornaments were being imported. In the 20th century, Christmas trees became the tradition we know them to be today.

Christmas tree fun facts!

- In 2012, 46 million Christmas tree seedlings were planted in the United States.
- Christmas trees are grown and harvested in all 50 states.
- The first president to place a Christmas tree in the White House was Franklin Pierce in 1856.
- People in Poland used to hang their Christmas tree upside down from the ceiling!
- Edward Johnson (a colleague of Thomas Edison) was the first person to use electrical lights to decorate a Christmas tree.
- Recycled Christmas trees can become sand and soil erosion barriers for years and have even become structures for fish habitat!

Source: web.extension.illinois.edu/trees/facts.cfm



"Trees give peace to the souls of men." - Nora Waln



Seasonal Maintenance

Pruning

Winter is a good time for pruning most trees. In the summertime, trees in South Dakota are using every leaf they can to produce as much food as possible. This is one reason why pruning live tissue in the summer is not always recommended.

One tip for pruning branches in the winter is to mark the branches you want to prune with some spray paint in the summer when you can determine your trees' pruning needs. This makes it easy to see the marked branches and remove them during the winter.



Tree Wrapping

The other simple, tree care to do is to wrap your thinly barked trees to help protect them from frost cracking. Frost cracks are usually vertical splits in the bark and outer layers of the tree caused by rapid thawing and freezing in the area below the bark. Different tree species have different thicknesses of bark; maples, for example, have what we consider to be thin bark. Even minor swings up above freezing with the help of the sun can cause frost cracking. A simple solution to help prevent this is to lightly wrap the trunk of your thinly barked trees (primarily maples) in something like burlap, this will help prevent frost cracking. Tree tubes are a viable alternative as well.

It is important to promptly remove your tree wrapping as soon as freezing temperatures have passed as to not trap moisture against the trunk.

"The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under who's shade you do not expect to sit." - Nelson Henderson



Tree Care

Real Christmas tree versus artificial

Why do we still recommend you go out and cut down your own Christmas tree each year? For one, we love when South Dakotans support fellow South Dakotans! Supporting local tree farms is a wonderful, yearly activity.

There are few things like loading up the car with your family and wandering through some snow to go pick your family Christmas tree. It is also a wonderful excuse to drink some hot apple cider or hot chocolate.

How to care for your tree

We will work our way from the bottom up. A good, clean cut at the base of the tree is important. Make sure you are using adequately sharp equipment and make a good cut. New technology is great, but the standard reservoir-type stands do the best job in keeping the tree “hydrated” and minimizing needle loss. It is expected to see your tree “drink” a quart of water per day.

Contact Us:

John Hartland
Staff Forester
South Dakota Department of Agriculture
and Natural Resources
Resource Conservation & Forestry Division
4305 S Louise Avenue
Suite 107

How to care for your tree

Make sure your stand is the proper size for your tree. Make the stand fit the tree; do not make the tree fit the stand. Make a fresh, perpendicular cut on the base of the tree when you get home and immediately place the tree into water.

Keep the tree away from heat sources (fireplace, wood burning stove, furnace, etc.). Monitor the water level daily and ensure the tree has water. If you put lights on your tree, make sure there are no exposed wires. Once Christmas is over and you are ready to remove your tree, search for local tree recycling options. Do not try to cut up your tree and use it as firewood!

Happy Holidays!

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“A cold wind was blowing from the north, and it made the trees rustle like living things.” - George R. R. Martin