



Living Christmas Trees

By Debbie Hager

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Living Christmas trees are festive and beautiful for the holiday season, as well as a new addition to your landscape after the holidays. Make certain the tree will fit into your landscape and that the type of tree you are considering will ultimately thrive in your local environment. Most evergreen trees grow to be quite large. It is important to take mature size into account during the decision making process. Consider when the tree can be planted; if the ground is frozen the tree will need to be cared for outdoors until a good planting time arrives.

Do not bring the tree inside right away. The tree can be left in the garage or a covered outside area to ease the transition to being indoors. The tree needs to be watered and protected from the weather during this transition period. A thorough cleaning of debris should be done at this time also. The location of the tree indoors should be away from heating ducts, fireplaces or wood stoves. Decorate the tree with lights that produce little heat and water the tree regularly to keep the soil and roots moist. Provide as much natural light as possible. A week or seven days is the premium time for a living tree to be indoors.

After the holidays, move the tree outdoors to a cool bright porch for a few days to ease the transition to outdoor temperatures. When planting the tree, make certain the top of the root ball or the tree crown is at or slightly above ground level. Water the tree deeply and apply mulch.

Colorado Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens* 'Glauca') is a good living tree choice. This spruce grows about one foot a year and likes plenty of water so is a good choice near lawns. The Colorado Blue Spruce is also good in a large planter for several years. The Dwarf Alberta Spruce (*Picea glauca* 'Conica') grows very slowly, three or four inches a year, and can be grown for years in a

container as a small Christmas tree. The dwarf spruce is conical in shape. The Dwarf Alberta Spruce prefers regular watering, soil enriched with organic material and shade from the hottest afternoon sun. Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesee*) and White Fir (*Abies concolor*) are also popular choices for living Christmas trees. They are moderate to fast growers depending on elevation.

There is something very special about displaying a living Christmas tree that provides a tree for you to plant in your garden or in a container after the holidays. Living Christmas trees are usually more expensive than cut Christmas trees, but they also provide more value and create less waste. Enjoy the upcoming holiday season!

Join Master Gardeners at this Saturday's free public education class, Selecting and Planting Deciduous Fruit Trees. Master Gardener Walt Miller will present essential information on proper planting techniques and bare root fruit tree selection, to include fruit tree varieties best suited for our El Dorado county location. The December 7th class is from 9:00 am to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Ct., Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.