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Keep Your Christmas Tree Fresh and Safe for the Holidays

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For December 2018 Village Life

Picking a fresh Christmas tree is, for many families, an annual holiday tradition. The resinous smell of a fresh-cut tree fills the home with holiday cheer and conjures a flood of warm yule memories dating back to childhood itself.

This season, thousands of families will trek to the foothills of El Dorado County to choose and cut their fresh, farm-grown Christmas tree. Members of the El Dorado County Christmas Tree Growers Association offer a wide variety of firs, cedar, pine, sequoia, and spruce species from which to choose. Each species is a little different, so try to match your tree choice to your family. For example, if you have young children, you might lean toward pines or firs with softer needles, while spruce trees have sharper needles. Whether you choose to cut your tree, or purchase one from a local retailer, the growers association offers several suggestions to help you pick a Christmas tree that'll stay at its beautiful best throughout the holiday season.

First, check for freshness. Bend a needle in half with your fingers; fresh firs should snap, fresh white pines should bend but not break. Gently grasp the inside of a branch and pull your hand toward you. The needles should stay on the tree. Or, tap the end of the tree on the ground. If a few needles fall off, it should be fine. If a lot of needles fall off, look for a different tree!

When you get your tree home hose it off to remove dirt, bugs and loose needles. Saw an inch or more from the bottom of the trunk and immediately put the cut end in the water stand. This fresh cut will allow the tree to absorb more water and keep it fresher longer. You may need to add water several times in the first few days and remember to keep the stand filled the entire holiday season!

Trees can look deceptively small outdoors so measure the spot where you plan to put the tree. That spot should be a cool location at least three feet away from heat sources like fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators, space heaters, candles, open flames, or heating vents. This is also a great time to check that your smoke alarms are working properly.

Christmas tree lights have earned the reputation for sparking fires on the trees. An electrical short in one light can easily ignite the tree. Before decorating the tree, CalFIRE recommends you inspect every light strand for frayed or cracked wires or broken sockets. If you find an offending strand *throw it away!* Do not attempt to make a repair. Instead, consider replacing the strand with safer LED lights which produce almost no heat, burn much brighter, and are shatterproof and shock resistant. They also consume less electricity.

Only use lights that carry the label of an independent testing laboratory like Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Never leave a lighted tree unattended and always unplug the lights when you go to bed. When the holidays are over immediately remove the tree from the house. Even a

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properly cared for tree eventually dries out and becomes a fire hazard. And, never burn the tree in a fireplace or woodstove!

There are several ways to dispose of your tree. Check with your local waste management company for pick-up days and/or drop-off points. Some companies will chip your tree and let you bring it home as mulch for your garden. In El Dorado Hills, the local Boy Scouts will pick up and recycle your tree for a small donation.

The Master Gardeners of El Dorado County wish you, your family, and friends an enjoyable and safe holiday season!

On February 23rd we will be hosting a ***Sustainable Organic Gardening*** Workshop, at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park, 95682. ***Sustainable Organic Gardening*** will help you develop a backyard food source that's cost-effective, improves your family's nutrition and food security, and offers a healthy hobby for the whole family. Whether you have a patio container garden or a quarter acre to farm, you can grow an abundance of healthy, delicious food through sustainable organic gardening practices. There is a fee for this one-day workshop, lunch included, \$25.00. To learn more and to pre-register, please visit our website <http://ucanr.edu/sustainable-organic-gardening> or call (530)-621-5528.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 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. Visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center. The garden is open on the second Saturday of each month, 9:00 a.m. to noon, till April 2019.

For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.