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**Christmas Tree Selection and Care**

The Christmas season is here and many households will be using a fresh-cut evergreen tree for their traditional holiday decorating. Getting a fresh tree and giving it the proper care helps make for a safe and attractive indoor display. Here are some things to consider.

The evergreen tree you purchase should be in the freshest condition possible. If you’re getting your tree from a local Christmas tree farm you have it made. However, trees from a tree lot are less likely to be as fresh; they’re often harvested several weeks before. Be sure to look these trees over carefully. A suitable tree should have resilient needles firmly attached to the branches. Only a limited number needles should fall when you brush or gently tug at them, or when you give the tree a vigorous shake.

After you’ve purchased a tree and have it home your next step is to give it a good drink of fresh water before you move it indoors. Because your tree no longer has roots it must now drink water through the cut end of its stump. To get this process started first cut a one-inch thick slice of wood from the bottom end to expose unclogged water-conducting cells (the tree’s “water pipes”); they’ve been plugged by sap and dirt, and can no longer take in water. Next, place the tree’s stump into a pan filled with clean water (a pan large enough to hold two or three gallons of water is better). By the next day it should be apparent that the tree is drinking. If it hasn’t you should recut the stump and return it to the water pan; repeat this process until the tree takes in water.

After the tree has been “refreshed” it’s ready for indoor display. Secure the tree in a sturdy tree stand with a water reservoir; fill the reservoir with water. Be sure to check the water reservoir daily and refill as needed. Your Christmas tree will retain its fresh condition longer if it’s kept on the cool side. Do not display the tree near hot spots such as a fireplace or a sunny, south-facing window. For fire prevention always use approved lighting that you’ve inspected for flaws. Never allow flammable materials such as discarded gift wrap to accumulate around your tree, and at all times ensure that there are no sources of ignition present (e.g., lighted candles).

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