

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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November 21, 2008

Another year has quickly rolled around and it is time to think about selecting your Christmas tree. I thought you might like to read last year's column that included tips to follow when choosing a tree. Harvesting a live Christmas tree has been a tradition my wife, kids, and I have followed for several years. This tradition has built family memories as we embark on our mission to find the perfect tree and it assures us the tree we choose will be fresh. If you prefer to harvest your own tree, you can find nearby Christmas tree growers by checking out the following website: http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/Horticulture_and_FarmersMarkets/christmasTreeDirectory.asp.

When a precut tree is purchased, it is not as easy to be sure of the freshness. The following tips will be helpful as you make your precut selection: be aware that some species of trees drop their needles quicker than others. For instance, spruces drop their needles the quickest, firs will drop them somewhat slower, and pines hang on to their needles the longest. Scotch and red pines tend to retain their needles somewhat longer than white pine.

A healthy green color usually indicates that the tree is fresh. Scotch pines have a natural yellow tinge. Some producers will spray their trees with a non-toxic green color to make them more appealing.

Fresh trees will have a fragrant odor. Be sure to check the bottom of the tree for stickiness, which is another indicator of the tree's freshness. The tree should also have a straight trunk, at the base, of at least five to six inches so it fits better in the stand.

Needles should be relatively pliable. The needles on trees that have been cut for some time will be more brittle and will break more easily. Gently bounce the tree butt on the ground; few if any needles should drop from a fresh tree.

The branches should be strong enough to support the lights and decorations without much sagging or breaking. Remember Charlie Brown's Christmas tree?

Once you have your tree home and are ready to put it in the tree stand, you will want to make two diagonal cuts on the bottom approximately one inch above the original cut. This will help ensure continued water uptake while the tree is in the house. Check the water level in your tree stand daily and keep it full. A tree can use up to one quart of water per day in the house.

Place your tree away from warm air vents, fireplaces, radiators, television sets or other heat sources. It is recommended that a fresh tree not be left in the home any longer than three weeks. The longer the tree remains in the house, the more flammable it becomes.

If you would like more information on selecting a Christmas tree, please call the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.