

Choose A Live Tree This Christmas

The day after Halloween, I see Christmas decorations, and that means poinsettias, Christmas trees, presents and food! Last year I received quite a few letters after Christmas from folks who wanted information about Christmas plants, so I will try to address some of those questions BEFORE Christmas this year.

This week's question: What should I know to select a Christmas tree?

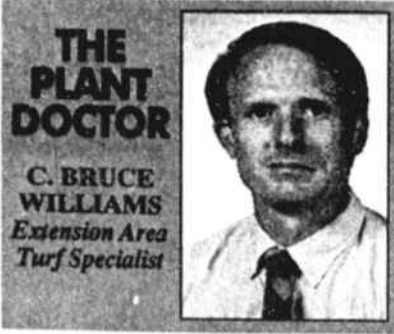
Answer: Nothing. Choose a Christmas tree from the heart and choose one that you like. Here are some of my thoughts on choosing a Christmas tree.

Christmas is just not complete without Santa Claus, poinsettias, an open fire and a LIVE Christmas tree. More than a million live Christmas trees are sold in North Carolina every year. Many of these trees come from northern sources, some as far away as Nova Scotia. However, North Carolina growers do an excellent job of producing high quality Christmas trees. So, if you have a choice, buy locally grown plants.

The average Christmas tree will take five to eight years to grow into a correctly shaped, healthy 6-foot specimen. Trees require special care, fertilization, pruning and cultivation. Years ago, Christmas tree production was viewed by some investors as a way to "get rich quick." Christmas tree farmers soon found out that producing high-quality trees requires substantial investment of financial resources, labor and knowledge before the perfect tree could be grown.

You will see many species of Christmas trees in the market place. I will briefly review and describe some of the more commonly available tree species.

Firs make an excellent Christmas tree. Three main species are prevalent in availability from North Carolina Christmas tree vendors: the Fraser fir (*Abies fraseri*), the Bal-



smell of its needles. The spruce has good branch structure for ornamentation but poor needle retention. I know from past experience that spruce needles can be tough to get out of the carpet after holiday festivities.

For me, the Christmas tree of choice is the eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). As a child, I remember walking the family farm looking up and down the barbed-wire fence rows for the perfect Christmas tree. The wild, native red cedar is a mean tree, with prickly needles and limber branches that will leave splinters in your hands for weeks.

Please note that cultivated and pruned red cedars are much better shaped and behaved than their wild counterpart. The fragrance of the red cedar is the essence of Christmas to me. Provide plenty of water for your Red cedar because this tree is especially prone to drying out.

A living Christmas tree is something special. It is the focal point for fellowship during the holidays, so, whatever kind of tree you choose for your Christmas, enjoy it.

Next week I will answer questions and discuss the secrets of keeping poinsettias and other Christmas plants beautiful. Send your gardening question and comments to *The Plant Doctor*, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia, N.C. 28422.

The Scotch Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) is the leading plantation-grown Christmas tree in the United States. This tree was originally planted for erosion control on poor soils. Proper cultivation and pruning will make a Cinderella out of this erosion fighter.

Scotch pines have stiff branches and excellent needle retention, but their natural color is yellow green. Many growers use natural vegetable dyes to spray trees and this practice alleviates the lack of green color common to the Scotch pine.

The Spruce (*Picea species*) is known worldwide for the clean fresh


Union Elementary Releases Fourth Grade Honors List

Union Elementary School in Shallotte has released its fourth grade honor roll and most improved list for the first nine-week grading period, as follows:

A-B Honor Roll
Kim Bowen, Felicia Geddings, Mallory Hewett, Joshua Knight, Shannon Long, Lavar Marlow, Todd Summer, Ashley Bourland, Ashley Bryan, Grace Moffett, Blaire Ansley, Keri Roberts, Byron Nelson, Christina Fiorentino, Donald Nealy, Robert Muller, Robert Morgan, Mary Katherine Baker, Becky Hall, Kortney Carter, April Gause, Meagan Potts, Jessica Schwab, Bradley Smith, Kristen Ward, Britt Williams, Megan Williams and Nikki Williams.

Most Improved
Neil Smith, Jermaine Bryant, Michael Cheek, Jacquelyn Bush, Japheth Hester, Martez Hill, Jessica Wilkinson, Takethia Gore, Robert Muller, Louis Tavares and Celia Everhart.

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