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News Release

The “green” way to recycle your Christmas tree, with minimal mess

Question: Now that we have become backyard gardeners we are trying to be more aware of our environment. We decided this year to purchase a live-cut Christmas tree. I’d like to know how to dispose of the tree after Christmas in an eco-friendly way. Any suggestions?

Answer: Many people are looking for ways to live in a more “organic” or “green” lifestyle and becoming a backyard gardener was a great way for you to get started. To continue through the holiday season buying a “green” fresh-cut tree is a great idea. Since many of the traditional varieties of Christmas trees such as Douglas Fir and Frazier Fir, do not grow well in our warmer climate, buying a living containerized tree of that type is not a good option. Buying a live cut tree is a “green” option especially if you are planning to recycle the tree when you’re finished with it.

There are many ways to recycle or dispose of a Christmas tree after the Holidays are over. The first problem is getting the tree out of the house without leaving a trail of dried needles along the way. The ideal method is to use a tree bag and place it under the tree when you first set it up. Then when you are done with the tree the bag may be pulled up around the tree, after removing the lights and decorations, and then it may be removed from the house without a mess. Another method is to place a drop cloth down, preferably one made of cloth and not the thin plastic type. Lay the tree, minus the lights and decorations on the cloth, wrap the tree the best you can in the drop cloth then drag the tree out of the house. Both these methods work to cut down on mess until you can get the tree outside, but then what do you do with it?

There are many uses throughout the state for recycled live-cut Christmas trees that don’t involve sending them to the landfill. Recycled trees are used in different parts of the state for composting, bird feeders, wildlife habitat, marsh nourishment, beach/dune erosion control, and in lakes and ponds for a fish habitat. Maybe you or a friend of yours is lucky enough to own a chipper to make some of the best smelling mulch you’ve ever had for your yard.

Finding the best way to recycle your Christmas tree may take some investigation on your part to find the most appropriate plan of action in your area. Many communities have a tree recycling center or roadside pick-up; to find out about one in your area you may call your city or town hall

to learn the location and hours of the local program. Another possibility is the Boy Scouts of America; you may call the local chapter to see if they are involved in a tree recycling program. The internet can also be a means of finding a resource; just search for “recycle Christmas trees” and check for local listings. Another family fun option is to place the tree in the backyard and decorate it with popcorn strings and suet filled pinecones for the birds, or you may cut it up for firewood for yourself or for a friend with a fireplace or wood stove. Using any of these ideas is a much greener way to dispose of the tree than taking it to a landfill.

When recycling your tree don't forget about ways to recycle other holiday leftovers such as live wreaths, garland and all those cardboard boxes that gifts came in. The wreath can be disposed of in the same way as the tree, but be sure and remove the wreath frame if there is one, and the boxes may be composted and later added to the garden. For more information on recycling you may go to www.epa.gov/osw/conservation/rrr/recycle.htm. I hope you all have a safe and happy New Year!

For more information about this topic or for other horticulture information, please contact Wendy at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email ulricwg@aces.edu.