



Tony Glover  
Regional Extension Agent  
News Release

## **How to Select a Christmas Tree**

**Question:** I love to use a real Christmas tree but the needles are always a mess. What type tree has the least problem with needle shedding?

**Answer:** The quick answer is “the fresher the tree, the better it will hold its needles.” The only way to know you have a freshly cut tree is to cut it yourself, or in my case, I just point to the tree and tell one of my sons to cut it for me. If you buy a tree from a local “choose and cut farm,” it probably doesn’t matter what species you purchase. The key to keeping the needles attached is to get the fresh cut tree stump into water as quickly as possible.

Choosing a pre-cut tree from a sales lot can be a little riskier than cutting the tree yourself, but if you follow these tips your chance of getting a good tree will improve greatly. Purchase a tree as soon as trees are available even if you don’t plan to decorate it for several days. The sooner you can get the tree in water the longer it will last. Most of the trees on sales lots were cut at the same time, so the longer they stay on the lot without water, the less likely they will even take water up when they are placed in home tree stands with water reservoirs. Look at the tree trunk near the base and if you see splitting, the tree most likely has dried so severely it will not absorb water.

Look for a tree with a healthy, green appearance and few dead or browning needles. Run your hand along a branch to see if needles seem fresh and flexible. Needles should definitely not pull free easily. If possible, bump the base of the tree on the ground. You should expect some of the old dead needles to fall off, but if green needles also fall off, the tree is not very fresh.

Once you have chosen that perfect tree and have arrived back home safely, you should make a fresh cut a couple inches above the original cut. This removes any clogged wood that would prevent water uptake. If you are not ready to place the tree indoors you may store in a shady area outdoors or in an unheated room or basement. Regardless of where you locate the tree, make sure to check the water reservoir frequently and keep it filled a couple inches or more above the tree’s base. I have not seen any research that proves any concoction added to the water works significantly better than plain tap water.

Another tip to consider involves tree location in the home. Keeping the tree away from heat sources such as air ducts, wood stoves, and fireplaces will prolong the freshness and reduce the risk of fire. Make certain all lights and extension cords are in good working order and turn lights off when the tree is not attended. Because our homes are much drier in the winter when the heating system is operating, a small room humidifier can be good for you, your house plants and Christmas tree.

Some trees are just naturally better at retaining their needles. Douglas fir, Eastern White Pine, Fraser fir, Leyland Cypress, Scotch pine and Virginia pine are considered to have excellent needle retention. Freshness, however, is the key to needle retention.

If you would like some additional tips and a list of the pros and cons of the most popular species, visit this web site: <http://cufan.clemson.edu/hgic/pdf/hgic1750.pdf>. You may also contact Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email [gloveta@aces.edu](mailto:gloveta@aces.edu) for additional questions.

*Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. Visit our website at [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair).*