

Pest Update (November 19, 2008)

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<http://www.state.sd.us/doa/Forestry/educational-information/Pest-Alert-Archives.htm>.

Any treatment recommendations, including those identifying specific pesticides, are for the convenience of the reader. Pesticides mentioned in this publication are generally those that are most commonly available to the public in South Dakota and the inclusion of a product shall not be taken as an endorsement or the exclusion a criticism regarding effectiveness. Please read and follow all label instructions and the label is the final authority for a product's use on a particular pest or plant. Products requiring a commercial pesticide license are occasionally mentioned if there are limited options available. These products will be identified as such but it is the reader's responsibility to determine if they can legally apply any product identified in this publication.

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Finding the perfect Christmas tree. This next week marks the start of the Christmas tree season with about 36 million trees being sold between Thanksgiving and Christmas. While artificial trees enjoyed increased sales for the past decade, those sales have stagnated and now there is a return to having the traditional tree. A traditional Christmas tree is also the environmental friendly way to celebrate the holidays. The average artificial Christmas tree has a life span of six years before it ends up in a landfill. The traditional Christmas tree, while used only one season, can become valuable mulch, a winter bird feeder or even used as a fish habitat after the holidays.

Here are some tips on picking out the perfect tree. The way to obtain the freshest tree is to harvest it yourself at one of the many choose-and-cut farms located in the state. If that is not possible, here is the way to check for freshness at a Christmas tree sales lot. First, give the tree a shake, only a few interior needles should fall off of the tree if it is fresh. If a pile of brown needles appears on the ground below

the tree, particularly from the branch tips, it is not a fresh tree. Next, take a branch and pull it gently through your hand. The needles should bend, not break, as your fingers run across them and the branch should slightly bend.



Once you get the tree home, leave it outside while you set the stand up. The choice of a stand is probably the most critical factor in maintaining the freshness of the tree once in the home. The stand should be able to hold one-half to one-gallon of water as the tree may absorb up to this amount in the first day! A good rule-of-thumb is a tree will use one quart of water per day for every inch trunk diameter at the base. If you have a tree with a three-inch base, it may use three quarts of water per day.

Just before you bring the tree in the house cut the base about one-inch from the bottom. This will open the sap-filled pores and allow water to be absorbed. The cut does not have to be slanted. Once the tree is in the stand add water and *never* left the stand become empty. If the stand is empty for more than 6 hours, the tree's pores plug up. Water uptake is significantly reduced and the needles will soon begin to fall. At this point there is nothing that can be done other than pull the tree out of the stand and recut the base – not a pleasant task once the lights and ornaments are on! Nothing needs to be added to the water in the stand to improve needle retention. The commercial products that say they increase freshness do not significantly increase the life of the tree and the home remedies such as aspirin, sugar, soft drinks and vodka only benefits pets with headaches (which they will have from drinking the vodka). Note: never give pets alcohol, it may kill them.

Also to prolong the freshness of the tree, place the stand in a spot that receives only indirect light from the window and not near any heat duct. This will reduce water loss from the tree. Another tip is to start out with a clean stand. Wash the stand out with a water – bleach solution, about a capful of bleach to a cup of water, to reduce the microorganisms that may also plug up the tree's pores.



Which is the best tree? Each species has its good points but the Fraser fir is probably one of the favorites. The tree is very fragrant, has excellent needle retention and the branches are stiff enough to hold ornaments. Balsam fir, pictured to the left, is another good choice though the needles do not last as long and the branches are not quite as stiff. Canaan fir, another popular fir appears to have qualities similar to Fraser fir and is also becoming a popular Christmas tree.



Pines are very popular with Scotch pine, pictured to the left, probably the most popular tree in the country. It also is very fragrant, has excellent needle retention and the branches are stiff. White pine is another pine commonly sold at Christmas tree stands and has a fair fragrance, but the needle retention is not quite as good as Scotch pine and the branches are very flexible meaning heavy ornaments may fall off. White pines do have very soft needles and if you are going to run

into the tree in the middle of the night this is the one!



Spruces are not as popular of Christmas trees primarily due to the poor needle retention. If you want to have a blue spruce you might want to wait until a couple of weeks before Christmas as the needles may only last that long. Blue spruce, pictured to the left, has the best needle retention of the spruces but does not have much of a fragrance. The branches are very stiff and can support the heaviest ornaments (but you do not want to run into this tree at

night!). White spruce, or Black Hills spruce is not commonly available though is used in the Black Hills. It does make a nice tree, particularly when cut fresh but it does not have much of a fragrance and occasionally one can produce a slight odor.

I hope everyone has a very happy Thanksgiving.