

Care of Your Live Christmas Tree

Live Christmas trees can be a long-lived investment if some basic rules are understood and followed. The main obstacle to the survival of a live Christmas tree is the risk of the tree being fooled into coming out of dormancy. Plants go into dormancy slowly over the course of the fall as temperatures and light levels drop. Dormancy is partially a state the plant has reached that allows it to hibernate, in effect, and thereby withstand the harsh conditions of the winter. When we bring a plant that is in dormancy into the home the warmth can begin to bring the plant out of dormancy as if it were spring. When we move the plant back outside it is no longer ready for the sub freezing temperatures and cells are killed.

It takes time and heat for a plant to be coaxed out of dormancy. Generally keeping a dormant Spruce or Fir indoors for 10 days or less is not enough time to bring it out of dormancy. Keeping the tree away from heat sources and when possible keeping the room a little cooler will go a long way to keeping the tree dormant.

Easing the trees transition from the home to the outdoors can also go a long way in keeping the chances of survival high. Depending on the weather trees can be moved to an unheated porch or garage for a week and then to their planting site. Of course if the forecast is for relatively mild weather the tree can go directly outside.

- Plan to use a live tree for 10 days or less. Less than 10 days if you must keep the house unusually warm.
- If possible dig the hole outside ahead of time and save the soil in a non-freezing location so planting after Christmas will be easier.
- Mulching the planting location ahead of time can also help to keep the ground from freezing and will make planting easier and the mulch can then be used around the tree after planting.
- Keep the tree away from heat sources and keep the room cooler than normal when possible.
- Remember to keep the root ball or soil mass moist as if you were watering a houseplant.
- After Christmas move the tree to a partly protected location for a week (like a garage or unheated porch, or even a very protected spot outside), if the forecast is for brutal weather.
- A tree could be left outside without being planted until spring if it were put in a very protected location and the root ball covered heavily with mulch.
- Wiltpruf is an antidessicant that can reduce the stress on evergreens significantly and could be used before the tree is brought in the house or applied after the tree is moved out.
- Mulch the tree after planting and consider surrounding with burlap to cut down on the desiccating effect of the winter wind.

Following these suggestions will nearly eliminate additional stress on the tree and make for a successful establishment.