

Post Rock Extension Answers

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Merry Christmas with a fresh cut tree

One of my favorite parts of the holiday season are Christmas trees. I love walking into a room and seeing a tall, beautiful, tree glowing and decorated for the season. Decorating the tree is a family tradition at my house and it never fails to get everyone in the holiday spirit. A fun way to bring some of the outdoors inside over the holidays is to buy a fresh cut Christmas tree. Toss aside the common misconception of fresh trees being messy and follow these tricks to choosing and caring for a live Christmas tree.

Before you head out to the tree farm, first decide where you will be placing the tree in your home. It is helpful to measure the height and width of the area you will place the tree prior to shopping. Don't forget to take a tape measure with you so when you find that perfect tree, you can make sure it's the right fit.

If you would like to visit a tree farm, visit the Kansas Christmas Tree Growers Association (www.kctga.com) to find a list of Christmas tree growers around the state. Christmas tree farm operators enjoy setting the stage for a cheerful and fun experience. Many also provide hot chocolate, cider, bonfires and candy canes. You will likely

be able to purchase a wreath or garland for your front door as well.

There are two choices when picking out a tree. Most farms will let you cut your own tree or they will have a selection of pre-cut trees for you to choose from. If you decide to cut your own tree, make sure the trunk or base of the tree is straight and 6-8 inches long so it will fit easily in the stand.

Pre-cut Christmas trees are available at various stores and farms and are great, convenient choices as well. Remember that trees sold on retail lots may have come from out of state and may have been exposed to drying winds in transit. They may have been cut weeks earlier. Buy trees early before the best trees have been sold and select from locations where trees are stored in the shade. You can find a fresh tree by looking for a healthy green appearance with few browning needles. Needles should be flexible and not fall off if you run a branch through your hand. Raise the tree a few inches off the ground and drop it on the trunk. Very few green needles should drop off the tree.

After you've gotten your tree home, you will want to prepare the spot in your house

with a tree stand and plenty of space to move the tree indoors. Before you bring it indoors, cut the bottom inch of the trunk off so that the tree can easily take up water. When the tree is originally cut at the farm, it begins to send sap down to close off the cells so that the canopy of the tree can be protected from water loss. It needs to be cut again to open up the cells that transfer water into the tree so that it won't dry up during the few weeks it is in your home. Make sure to replenish the water in the tree stand regularly since the tree can transpire up to a gallon of water per day. This reduces the risk of fire hazards by keeping the tree hydrated as well as allowing the tree to act as an indoor air purifier during the holidays.

Whether you choose a locally grown tree, purchase a live pre-cut tree, or enjoy your allergy-free artificial tree in your home this year, I hope it brightens your holiday season!

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at choman@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (738-3597).