

## **Choose a Nebraska Tree This Season**

The decorated evergreen tree is the traditional symbol of Christmas. Many families choose a real tree rather than an artificial one because of the beauty and aroma that a natural tree adds to the Christmas celebration.

When buying a Christmas tree this holiday season, remember to select a fresh tree and keep it watered. A dry tree can be a fire hazard. There is no better way to ensure freshness than by cutting a live Christmas tree.

Originally, Christmas trees were harvested from natural forests. Today, most trees are grown and cultivated in plantations to provide the best possible trees to consumers. During the six to 15 years it takes to grow a quality Christmas tree, each is pruned and pampered to achieve the full symmetrical appearance people prefer.

Nebraska has over 50 Christmas tree farms that grow and sell live Christmas trees. These businesses are primarily choose and harvest operations where the customer can select and cut his or her own live tree. Cutting a live Christmas tree ensures a better quality tree, and provides a unique and pleasant family experience. Live trees are much fresher than trees cut and shipped from western and northern states, often six weeks or more before Christmas.

The overwhelming majority of Christmas trees grown and sold in Nebraska are pines. Pine trees have relatively long needles in clusters of two, three or five. The most common species of pine sold in Nebraska are Scotch, White, Austrian and Ponderosa.

Blue and Norway spruces are the two most common types of spruce trees grown as Christmas trees in Nebraska. They usually have good form, a pleasing odor and dense foliage. Blue spruces usually are bluer in color, while the Norway spruce is darker green. Both trees can be fairly expensive and lose their needles more quickly than pines in warm rooms.

Each year more fir trees are grown by Nebraska Christmas tree producers, but generally only in eastern Nebraska. The most common fir trees grown in Nebraska are Concolor fir, balsam fir and Douglas fir. Fir trees generally have a narrow form and good color, density and needle retention.

About 50,000 Nebraska-grown Christmas trees are available for the 2007 season, according to the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. The most popular Christmas tree species grown in Nebraska is Scotch pine. Other common species available in Nebraska include white pine, Austrian pine, Colorado blue spruce, Concolor fir, Douglas fir and Norway spruce.

For those interested in locating a Christmas tree farm contact any UNL Extension, Natural Resources District or Nebraska Forest Service office or visit the web at <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/pub/apd/trees.htm> .