

How To Choose A Christmas Tree

Tips from expert arborist Mark Chisholm

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VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – The Christmas season is a busy time for a tree expert. It is a time of year where their basic knowledge will be called upon by family, friends and neighbors alike. Shopping for a tree should be a joyous occasion. Here are a few tips from third-generation, certified arborist **Mark Chisholm** that might remove some of the common stressors from your shopping event.

Select Your Location

Before you head to the lot or store to pick out this year's show-tree, you must be certain of where you want to place the tree and the space available. Try to avoid spots near heat sources such as radiators, fireplaces, heating vents and even televisions or sundrenched windows. Also try to tuck the tree into a low-traffic area to avoid accidental bumping and possible safety issues. Next, you'll need to measure the space dimensions you have to work with, bearing in mind that a tree stand will add a few extra inches of height, as will a star or angel to finish the top.

Consider a Charitable Tree Lot

If you're like me and look forward to contributing to the spirit of the season while picking a tree, you can look for charitable lots. One I like to shop at donates all of their proceeds to a local children's hospital. Another option would be to purchase an extra tree and then donate it to a family that cannot afford a tree or an organization that finds the right home for you.

Select the Right Tree

At the lot you will see three or four common varieties of trees. Some things to consider when choosing the right type will be the color, shape and feel of a tree. Some trees are dark green and others have gray or white hues. There are trees with tight branching patterns and then some with more spaces. One thing to remember is that if the tree looks very full while absent of ornaments, it may be difficult to decorate it. Most trees that end up on a lot have been groomed and sheared to look great during the selection process. Then you get it home and realize that there's very little space for ornaments. Choosing one with some empty spaces might be a better route. You could also bring a few of your favorite ornaments with you to test at the store. Also, be sure that the first foot of trunk is straight too, or you'll have one heck of a time getting it to stand up correctly at home.

Try a Live Tree

Balled and burlap or container trees can be a nice choice for a live tree. It will be heavier and need more diligent care once home. After the holidays are over, it can be added to the landscape. One extra step you'll need to adopt is the assessment of the planting space for proper growing space, sunlight and also watering needs. Make sure that the species you are choosing will thrive in your climate. A tree shipped from New Hampshire will have a rough time surviving the warm summer months in South Carolina.

Test Your Tree for Freshness

Once you have the look you want, you'll need to test the tree for freshness. Trees that are on a lot have been cut and shipped weeks earlier. Look for greener trees with no signs of wilting or browning. What can be tricky here is the fact that many trees have undergone a colorizing treatment before they were shipped. That is why a quick, pull test is next on my list. Grab a limb or two and pull them toward you. Then release the limb slowly, allowing it to pull through your hand. A fresh tree will keep most or all of its needles in this test, and the limb will not feel brittle or snap. Flexibility in the limbs is a must if the tree is to remain green for the next few weeks indoors. The final test is a quick drop test. Lift the tree a few inches off of the ground and then let it fall until the butt of the tree hits the ground. That quick shock will release any dry needles and give you a good feel for how fresh the tree truly is. Don't worry about a few needles letting loose throughout the interior.

Prepare Your Tree for Indoors

Once you pick the perfect tree and truck it home, make a fresh cut at the base, unless it was already done for you. One thing I like to do before I bring my tree inside is to take my **STIHL blower** out and give the tree a quick blast to remove any loose needles, debris wedged in the branches and, most importantly, remove any insects or egg masses that might have survived the journey.

Recycle Your Tree

After Christmas is over, you'll need to dispose of the family tree. There are many recycling programs all over the country that account for the recycling of 93% of all trees nationally. Most get ground into mulch to be given back to the community or utilized as mulch in flower beds and parks. Other communities have extensive erosion programs that take advantage of this biodegradable resource.

I always enjoy shopping for my tree. It gives me a laugh when I see a "cut your own" farm advertising certain types of trees that I know do not grow in my area. I like to walk up and ask, "Where do you have the Fraser firs?" and watch as they point me toward the Douglas firs or even a spruce-youch!

Want more information and advice from Mark? Visit www.treebuzz.com or www.stihlusa.com.

About Mark Chisholm:

One part acrobat, one part expert rope climber, one part tree physiologist, and several parts competitor and thrill seeker,

Mark Chisholm is a third-generation, certified arborist with his family-owned Aspen Tree Expert Company in New Jersey. His expertise in tree care has made him a sought after consultant and industry spokesperson for the world of arboriculture, and he regularly travels the globe to consult with international arborist organizations.

Sponsored by STIHL, Chisholm has won every International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) New Jersey Chapter Tree Climbing Championship for the last 19 years and has conquered the wider tree-climbing world on three occasions, most recently in 2010, when he won his third ISA International Tree Climbing Championship.

About STIHL Inc.:

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