

Trowel Talk!

December, 2017

Christmas tree: Branching out for the holidays

When December rolls around, Christmas tree lots spring up everywhere. If you purchase your tree from a commercial lot, remember that many Christmas trees are trucked a considerable distance, spending days or weeks in transit. So, look for locally produced trees because they are usually fresher.

An interesting alternative to city tree lots is a trip to a tree farm. These farms offer several advantages. The first is freshness. You know you are getting the freshest tree possible when you see it being cut or you cut it yourself. The second advantage is selection. There are shapes and sizes to suit every taste - you just have to choose. Finally, many tree farms have activities such as sleigh rides which can make your visit a special event.

The tree you purchase should have a fragrant smell and moist flexible needles. Grasp a branch between your thumb and forefinger and pull it toward you. If the tree is fresh, no more than 5-10 needles should come off in your hand. Avoid any trees with broken branches or damaged bark. Bounce the tree lightly on its cut end if you can or shake it. Avoid trees that shower you with needles. Know ahead of time the size of tree that will fit into your room. Make sure that the tree has a long trunk below the lowest branches.

As quickly as possible after you get home, place the Christmas tree into a stand that contains at least 8 cups of water. Cutting an inch off the bottom at a slight angle before mounting your tree will help water absorption and ensure freshness longer. Make this cut just before placing the tree in water. A cut tree will absorb 4 litres of water on the first day and about one litre of water per day thereafter. Most live trees can only survive being indoors for a week.

Make sure the tree is mounted securely in its stand away from open flames or heat sources. Candles or open-flame ornaments should never be used. Strings of lights should be checked to



Photo: Christmas Tree Farmers of Ontario

Selecting the perfect tree at an Ontario tree farm.

ensure that bulbs are working properly, cords are not frayed and connections are secure. Replace the string of lights if anything looks questionable. If you leave the house and your tree is unattended, remember to turn off the Christmas tree lights before you leave.

If you can't put the tree up right away, store it in an unheated garage or some other area out of the wind and freezing temperatures. Make a fresh one inch cut on the butt end and place the tree in a bucket of warm water. When you bring the tree indoors, make another fresh cut.

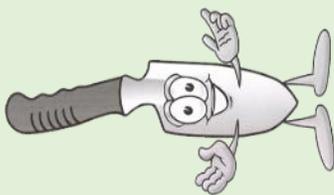
To keep a tree fresh, you only have to use plain water. No commercially prepared mixes such as aspirin, sugar or additives are necessary. It can be a nuisance to water a Christmas tree after it is decorated and surrounded by presents. One solution is to use a watering can or funnel with a 90-120 cm (3 to 4 ft) length of vinyl tubing attached snugly to the spout.

At the end of the holiday season many communities pick up trees and recycle them into wood chips. Another option for your natural Christmas tree is to put it in your back yard and place bread and suet among the branches for the birds.

*Sheila McVey
Retired Master Gardener*

After eight years volunteering as editor of Trowel Talk I will be stepping down from the job. Stay tuned for a new and improved newsletter from our team of volunteers who will be taking over.

~ Mary Ann



- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 8, Number 12
- <http://mgottawa.ca>
- Editor: M.A. Van Berlo
- newsletter@mgottawa.ca

December TO DO List

- Do one final walk around the yard to make sure tools and frost-tender ornaments are safely stored. Anything that collects water and can potentially break should be turned over or covered.
- Make sure the bird feeders are filled and installed where they can be viewed from indoors.
- It's time to wrap or cover any shrubs that need protection. Hopefully, posts were installed prior to freeze-up and now it's just a matter of stapling burlap or perennial cloth to the supports.
- It's too late to plant bulbs outdoors so if you still have some that aren't planted, pot them up, water them to moisten the soil but not saturate it, and put the pot in a cool dark place (above freezing – the refrigerator works well). Bulbs need a period of eight weeks of cold dormancy. After that, take the pot out, water and put it in good light. Within a few weeks your forced bulbs should bloom.
- If you have gardening or plant ID questions, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Don't forget the birds! While they can forage for food on their own, a feeder supplements their food supply and can provide hours of entertainment from inside the comfort of your house.

There are blends of seeds to attract different types of birds. Black oil sunflowers seem to be a favourite of many types of birds.

Suet is also appreciated, as the fat in the suet will provide energy (and therefore warmth) for the coldest winter days.

A squirrel baffle is a good investment to reduce the amount of seed

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily

- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

No clinics are scheduled until next spring.

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

From Shade to Sun – Converting a Garden – January 4 – 7:00 pm

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by Greely Gardeners Group (Guest fee: \$3)

Edibles in the Garden – February 15 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

City View United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Nepean

Hosted by Nepean Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$4)



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>



they 'steal'. You will need to ensure the feeders are far enough from any branches or structures that a squirrel can use as a launching pad to get to the feeder. Squirrels will still come around, but they will be on the ground cleaning up any seeds dropped by the birds.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

A feeding station with an effective squirrel baffle

Consider including a heated bird-bath as a source of water for the birds. The dish will need to be a bit deeper than a conventional birdbath – since the water is heated, it will evaporate into the colder winter air so more water means, less chance of it going dry. The basin will still need to be refilled regularly – if you're going away, ask the house-sitter to refill it or unplug the heater if it doesn't have an automatic shut-off.



Photo: Vicki Sangster-Williams

Birds enjoying their backyard spa.