

## **HAPPY HOLIDAYS FOREVER: PLANTING A LIVING CHRISTMAS TREE**

by Andrea Ray Chandler, Olathe GOA

It seems such a shame to throw away a perfectly grown evergreen tree after Christmas, even if it was grown to be a “disposable” crop! Such a shame in fact, that more people are considering getting a living Christmas tree, a ball-and-burlap one they can plant after the holidays. [Not to mention the cost, good heavens!]

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

However, there are some very important considerations you should think over before plunging into this project.

- The size of a full-grown tree. Like puppies, the perfectly sheared trees look oh-so-cute. But like Great Dane puppies, they get BIG. Most of the evergreens sold for holiday trees get 25-40 feet tall in just twenty years, and about a third as wide. Many trees can get twice that tall or more at maturity! That’s a big footprint on your yard, and it also means that the tree shouldn’t be planted any closer than 15-18 feet from your driveway, sidewalk, or anywhere near a more mature tree that will shade it.

- Does your household like to put up holiday decorations the day after Thanksgiving? You can put up all the other decorations, but a live tree will require that you leave it outside in the cold until Christmas Eve! The poor thing can’t take being indoors in that unnaturally warm [and dry] environment for very long. This also means that the day after Christmas is official Tree Planting Day.

- When decorating the tree, don’t cover it with masses of ornaments, and especially avoid heavy ones made from solid glass, wood, plastic and so on. DO NOT use electric lights; you can burn the needles from the strong heat, or the extra warmth can also cause the tree to break dormancy [wake up from its hibernation], which would cause injury after it’s planted outdoors in the cold.

### **PLANTING**

You will need to dig a hole wider than the root ball of the tree. Call around to the local nurseries where you’re anticipating buying this tree, and ask them how big that root ball will probably be. Then after you’ve dug that hole, store the soil someplace where it won’t freeze. Fill the hole a foot-deep in straw so the hole doesn’t freeze too much, too. Lay a piece of plywood over the hole so no one gets hurt.

When tree-shopping, shorter is not only easier to handle, and less expensive, but it also transplants more easily. A five-foot tall tree is way-plenty large enough. Be sure to avoid trees with frozen root-balls; the freezing, thawing and freezing is hard on the plant.

Keep the tree’s root-ball moist all the time, especially when it’s indoors for its brief visit.

When planting, remove the straw from the hole, and the burlap, cage or other wrappings from around the tree. Do NOT leave any string or other wrapping around the trunk! Untied string or

wire will eventually girdle, or strangle the tree. And of course, make sure all the decorations are all removed.

Refill the soil around the tree to the depth matching the top of the root ball. Soak the tree in well! Also, continue to water the tree during thaws all winter long. If it's been windy and tree, the nursery can also sell you an anti-desiccant spray to keep the tree from drying out so easily [this spray is not a substitute for good watering, though.]

Use two or three stakes to secure the tree against falling over in the wind. Naturally, the stakes are grounded outside of the root ball. The nursery can also sell you the appropriate staking equipment.

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