Make holiday memories last by adding a living tree to your landscape

The Christmas tree is an iconic symbol of the holidays. A living Christmas tree--with roots still attached--is an environmentally friendly version of the traditional Christmas tree. And when the Christmas season is over, plant your living tree outside. Fortunately, January is a great time to plant trees in Florida.

There are several things to consider before deciding to purchase and then transplant a living Christmas tree.

First, select a species that is well-suited to your growing area. In Northwest Florida, we live in plant hardiness zone 8. While many evergreen trees are not suited to the Gulf Coast, there are several that will thrive in our area.

Tree species that are suited for Florida include red cedar, Leyland cypress, sand pine, and junipers. Some unusual choices include the Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*) and deodar cedar.

Be sure to select a tree whose mature size will work in your landscape. If you don’t have space for a full-size tree, consider placing a smaller container plant on a tabletop. You can keep the plant on a patio or deck during the remainder of the year and bring it inside to decorate for the holidays.

Don’t try to find your live Christmas tree in the woods. Digging up live trees can cause transplant shock, and the tree will probably die. Wild trees are also unlikely to have the classic Christmas tree shape. Many nurseries grow Christmas trees in containers. These trees can be brought inside the house and decorated just like cut real trees or artificial trees.

When you go to select your tree, look for one with well colored needles. Avoid buying trees with yellowing or brown tips. If you are purchasing a containerized tree make sure that it is not pot bound. The root ball of a balled and burlapped (B&B) tree should be firm and well shaped.

When taking the tree home, try not to injure the roots of the tree by dropping it, this will stress the tree and do not carry the tree by its trunk. Always be sure to cover the tree when bringing it home to prevent desiccation by the wind.
Before moving the tree inside the house, acclimate the tree to its new environment by moving it to an unheated, but sheltered area (such as garage or patio), for a couple of days.

Once inside and decorated, remember to take care of your tree properly. Locate the tree in as cool a location as possible. Keep it away from heating vents, fireplaces and other heat sources. Use limited numbers of miniature tree lights. Keep the root ball evenly moist, but not flooded.

After the holidays, readjust the tree to outdoor temperatures by placing it back in the garage or sheltered patio for several days. Try to plant the tree as soon as possible. Do not wait until spring.

For more information on how to properly plant a tree, view a University of Florida online publication at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep112](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep112) or call your local Extension Agent.

Once your tree has been planted in the landscape, you can decorate it every holiday season with yard-brightening tinsel, ornaments, and outdoor lights. Make holiday memories last by adding a living tree to your landscape.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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