

Choosing a Christmas Tree

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It is that time of year when we start thinking about buying a fresh Christmas tree. We can either go to a store or lot and buy a pre-cut tree, or we can go to one of the over 800 Christmas tree farms in NJ. Pre-cut trees were likely cut in early November and come from NY, Canada or PA. Going to a Christmas tree farm to cut a fresh tree can be a fun adventure for the entire family.

What should we look for when selecting a Christmas tree? There are typically 2 popular genera to choose from – spruce and fir. There are many species of spruces and firs. The most common spruces are Norway spruce, Colorado Blue spruce, Serbian spruce and White spruce.



Likewise, there are many fir species, the most common being Balsam fir, Fraser fir, Canaan fir, Concolor fir, and Douglas fir (although

not a true fir). There are distinct differences between spruces and firs and it can be daunting when you are looking at hundreds of trees.

On the next page is some helpful info for identifying those differences. For more information check out the New Jersey

Christmas Tree Growers' Association at www.njchristmastrees.org



Firs	Spruces
Needles $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long and flat	Needles 1 inch long
Needles are flat, blunt / rounded tipped and soft to the touch	Needles are pointed, stiff and spiky
Needles whorl in a semi-circle around upper side of twig; with each needle curving upward	Needles grow in spiral around twig like a bottle brush; needles feel square when rolled between fingers
Needles have 2 bright bluish / white / silver stripes along underside	Needles solid green / blue-green on both sides
If a single needle is plucked from a twig it comes out cleanly leaving a little hole	If a single needle is plucked from a twig a piece of twig skin tears off leaving a torn scar
Branches pliable and bend easily; difficult to support heavy ornaments	Branches firm and can support heavy ornaments
Firs are very fragrant. Concolor firs have a citrus fragrance when crushed with fingers	Spruce trees are less fragrant and can even be a little unpleasant smelling
Needle retention is greater than spruces	Needle retention is less than firs
Cones grow upright and disintegrate in the fall	Cones hang from branches and remain on trees throughout winter

Care of your tree once you bring it home is critical to its survival through the holidays.

- Trees can be temporarily stored for several days after cutting in a cool location, out of the sunlight and wind. Place a freshly cut tree in a bucket that is kept full of water.
- Before placing your tree in a stand, make a fresh cut removing about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the base of the trunk.
- Your tree stand should fit your tree. Do not whittle or shave the sides of the trunk to fit. Those outer layers of wood on the trunk are essential for the up-take of water and decreasing needle drop.
- Your tree stand needs sufficient capacity to hold at least a quart of water.
- Check water level daily to make sure the level does not go below the base of the tree. **Trees can drink a quart of water a day!**
- Keep trees away from sources of heat, e.g., heaters, vents, fireplaces.

