

CHRISTMAS TREE SELECTION AND CARE TIPS

Taking a trip to visit a local choose and cut Christmas tree farm is a tradition for many Louisiana families every holiday season. The beauty and aroma of a Louisiana-grown Christmas tree creates lasting memories for children and adults alike.

To aid in the selection and care of your Louisiana-grown tree, Commissioner Strain offers these helpful hints:

- Before leaving your house to purchase a tree, decide where it will go and how large it should be. Stick with your original decisions once you reach the farm. Big trees look beautiful in the openness of a farm, but they can take away from the attractive features of a smaller home.
- If certain sides of the tree will be up against a wall or in a corner, you can select a tree that is not uniform in shape and still have a beautiful tree showing.
- Once you have selected the right size and shape, check the freshness of the tree, if purchased on a tree lot, by grabbing a branch between your thumb and forefinger and pulling it toward you. If the tree is fresh, few needles will come off in your hand.
- When you shake or move the tree, you should not see an excessive amount of needles fall to the ground. It is normal for some brown needles inside the trees branches to fall, which will continue during the life of the tree.
- At home, keep the tree in water in a sheltered, cool place until you are ready to decorate and display it. Be sure to keep the tree protected from wind and sun.
- Before you display your tree, make a new, straight cut across the base of the trunk approximately ½ inch above the original cut. Place the tree in a stand that will hold a gallon of water or more.
- Always keep the tree stand filled with water. Dried sap will form a seal over the cut stump within several hours if the water level falls below the base of the tree. If this occurs, make another fresh cut in the butt-end and promptly fill the stand with water. Use hot tap water which will soften sap and facilitate absorption.
- A tree will absorb as much as a gallon of water or more in the 24 hours after it is cut, and one or more quarts everyday after. Maintaining a steady water level prevents the needles from drying out and dropping off and the boughs from drooping. Water will also keep the tree fragrant. Do not allow the water pan to empty or go below the tree base.
- Also, mist the branches and foliage with water daily to keep them moist and fresh. Allow enough time to dry before using lights.
- Make sure your tree is well supported and away from sources of heat such as vents (close it), fireplaces, radiators and television sets. Lighted candles or other open flames should never be used on or around real Christmas trees.
- Test light cords and connections before putting them on the tree. Do not use worn or frayed wires and electric cords, or broken and empty sockets. Use a multiple strip outlet with surge protection.
- Do not let wrapping paper and electric toys accumulate under the tree.
- Always unplug electric lights when you leave the house or before you go to bed.
- Consider recycling your tree after Christmas or turn it into a bird feeder with suet, peanut butter and seeds. Be sure to remove the tree stand, plastic and all ornaments to qualify the tree for recycling.

By following these tips, your Christmas experience will be filled with the pleasure and memories only a Louisiana-grown Christmas tree can provide.