

2009 11 25 Alamosa Trees
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Considering a Live Christmas Tree?

Walk around town shortly after Christmas in Alamosa and you'll see a lot of forlorn Christmas trees stripped of their ornaments and slumped against the trash can or flung into the driveway.

Perhaps you're considering a living tree this year. Whether you're environmentally conscious or just love the thought of continuing to enjoy a tree for many years, you need to think ahead.

If you're buying a tree that has been outdoors and that you intend to plant after Christmas, it should only be indoors for 4-7 days. Keep it moist, not sopping wet, and display it in a cool spot away from heat sources. If the tree is left indoors longer, dormant buds may begin to open and the tree could die from winter kill when it is moved outside. Back east, foresters receive a flood of calls from distraught home owners in the spring when their trees turn brown and crisp.

Consider where you'll plant your tree and dig a hole well in advance. Last year, Alamosa's early December soil wasn't frozen. In fact, the City planted a Horizon elm tree in the park across from my house. Other years, the soil was frozen six inches down by early December. People often plant their tree in a temporary site until spring since the newly planted tree will need protection from bright sun and damaging spring winds. If you plant in a temporary location, you can leave the burlap or container in place. If you plant in a permanent location, be sure to prepare the hole properly. The hole's diameter should be THREE times the width of the tree's root ball. Check the "Planting & Care Guide" at AlamosaTrees.net for more planting information.

Not only do you need plan how the tree will fit into your landscape, you need to ascertain it will fit in your house and that you can get it inside! A 5-6 foot-tall balled and burlapped tree may weigh as much as 200 pounds. Many people choose a smaller container tree that is easier to manipulate. Its needles may not tickle your ceiling, but you can add a tall angel or star ornament to add height.

Be sure to select a species that grows well here. Most cut Christmas trees are Douglas or balsam fir, pine or spruce. Douglas fir and various pines and spruce do well in Alamosa. Check the tree lists at AlamosaTrees.net for more information on appropriate trees.

Inspect the tree you're considering to make sure it is healthy. Feel the soil; it should be soft and moist, not dry and hard. Check the firmness of the entire root ball; it should feel firm and tightly, not loose. Trees with loose root balls are less likely to survive. Observe the needles and lightly run your fingers over them; they should be green and firm, not brittle and dry. Few should fall off. Gently bend a branch; it should be flexible. Look for live buds at the tips of branches; they should look greenish, not brown and brittle.

Handle the tree carefully when you maneuver it into your vehicle and home. Lift it carefully by the container or root ball, NOT by the trunk. Guide it carefully through doorways and set it down gently.

Once the holiday is over, carefully remove decorations. The tree will probably need to be hardened off a bit before placing it in the ground. Perhaps placing it in the garage or on a sheltered porch for a few days will help it transition from indoor warmth to outdoor freezing night temperatures.

Sounds like way too much planning and work for short-term enjoyment? Maybe a Norfolk pine that will remain indoors is a better bet. Of course, you'll need an indoor spot to keep the tree year around.

“Never worry about the size of your Christmas tree. In the eyes of children, they are all 30 feet tall.” Larry Wilde, “The Merry Book of Christmas”