

## THE QUESTION THIS CHRISTMAS MIGHT BE ARTIFICIAL OR REAL.

If you ask Terry Fogle of Fort Valley Nursery, he will tell you that a real tree adds a lot to your holiday season.

“They smell wonderful and if you make sure you water them often, they will last well into the new year,” said the man who has sold thousands of Christmas trees in his 35 years as one of the founders of the landscaping company and nursery.

You may have some trouble finding a real tree this year as they are in short supply. In 2009, the weather damaged a lot of Christmas tree crops in the mid-Atlantic. “It takes about 10 years for a Christmas tree to grow, so that is part of the reason for the short supply this year.”



He also noted that in 2009, we were still experiencing the fallout of the Great Recession. Many tree farmers were affected by that financial disaster and chose not to replant for business reason. “I called all around – North Carolina, Pennsylvania – looking for extra trees this year and there just aren’t any to be found,” he said.

If you are fortunate enough to have gotten a real tree this Christmas, Terry has a few words of advice to make sure your tree is a beautiful centerpiece to your holiday celebration.

“There is no such thing as buying your tree too early,” he noted. Go ahead and buy your tree and if you are not going to put it up right away, leave it in a cold area, either outside or in a garage in a bucket of water. When you are ready to put it up, do a fresh cut off the bottom of the tree to make sure that it can take in all the water it needs. If you let the water evaporate from the tree holder, the tree stump will reseal and won’t be able to get water to keep it fresh.

Before you bring it in, it is also good to give the tree a good shake to shake out any dead or loose needles or any leaves that might be caught in the branches.

Find the best place to put your tree up. It is best to find a place out of the main traffic area and make sure you do not put it near a heat source. “If you put it next to your heat source, it will dry out the tree and could cause a dangerous situation,” he advised.

When you go to get a tree, make sure you have an idea of where it will stand that way you buy the right size tree. There are also many different kinds of Christmas tree. Fort Valley Nursery specializes in fir trees like the Frazier Fir. “It usually has a beautiful shape and the fir branches are sturdy enough to handle heavy ornaments,” he said. Other trees like white pines and scotch pines have a wonderful smell, but cannot handle the heavy ornaments. And, of course, in this area there are folks who prefer to go out back and get a cedar tree. The fir trees are not native to this area because of the rainfall. “They don’t like wet feet,” he said with a laugh.

Terry enjoys Christmas because people are always happy and excited when they come to choose their Christmas tree. “Some people are really picky. They will go back and forth and back and forth making sure they have just the right tree,” Terry said. “It is fun to listen to their debate.”

Some feel bad about getting a tree and using it for just a month, but Terry said they should consider that the tree is a crop. It has been raised to be the centerpiece of your Christmas. Enjoy it, he said. “And remember, water, water, water.”

Story by Cindy Earehart Rinker, professional writer and storyteller8 of WriteWords of Shenandoah County.