

Many Nebraskans will soon head out and try to find that perfect Christmas tree for the season. However, UNL Extension Forester Dennis Adams says whether it is a pre-cut tree from a retail lot or a cut-your-own tree, freshness is key.

“If you want to enjoy your Christmas tree during the entire holiday season, buy a fresh tree and keep it fresh,” Adams said. “To prevent disappointment and potential hazard, check for freshness before you purchase a Christmas tree.”

Obviously, cutting one’s own live Christmas tree ensures freshness and quality, but even pre-cut trees from Nebraska are much fresher than trees cut and shipped from western and northern states, often long before Thanksgiving.

“Buying a Nebraska-grown tree also ensures freshness and supports the local economy,” Adams said.

To check for freshness when buying a pre-cut tree, Adams recommends to gently stroke the needles.

If green needles drop off, the tree is not fresh. Bright green foliage does not ensure freshness. Almost all pre-cut Christmas trees are sprayed with green colorant to enhance their natural color.

Another test is to lift the tree and strike the butt on the ground. Too many green needles dropping indicate the tree is not fresh and it might be wise to reject it.

“After you have selected a tree and brought it home, store the tree in a cool, protected area, preferably outdoors,” Adams said. “Keep the butt in a pail of water until you are ready to bring it inside to decorate.”

Before erecting the Christmas tree, take a few precautions to ensure freshness:

- Saw about one-half inch off the butt of the tree stem straight across (not at an angle). The fresh cut removes clotted resins that could prevent the tree from absorbing water.
- Mount the tree in a stand that holds plenty of water and add water daily to keep the stand filled.

A fresh Christmas tree may absorb a gallon or more of water daily depending upon size and condition. If the water level in the tree stand drops below the cut surface of the stem, a fresh cut may be necessary.

After the holidays are over, a Christmas tree’s usefulness can continue.

With some imagination a discarded Christmas tree can be put to a number of uses around the home, Adams said.

The tree can be erected in the yard adorned as a winter bird feeder.

The boughs may be stripped and used for mulch around flower beds or the trunk may be sawn into firewood.