

You've decided to purchase a live tree that you can enjoy this Christmas and then outside for years to come. It's a wonderful idea but there are some points to consider:

- What kind of tree? Will it grow well on your property?
 - A dwarf evergreen may be a better choice for a small yard or maybe a yew, juniper, arborvitae or even a holly. Ward's may have a few available, depending on weather.
 - Consider the tree's growth rate and what its height and width will be at maturity. Fir prefers cool and moist growing conditions. Pines will get very tall and as they grow, the distance from ground to the first branches increases. Norway spruce as a live specimen may be prone to drying out while it is in your home.
 - Survival Rate. Smaller trees may be in better proportion to the size of the root ball and stand a better chance of survival.
 - Ward's offers container grown Colorado Spruce, Fat Albert Colorado Spruce, Dwarf Alberta Spruce in sizes from 18 inches to 6 feet as well as ball and burlap wrapped Fir or Spruce that are 5 to 6 feet.

- First things First – Plan Where You'll Be Planting Your Tree
 - To plant your tree after Christmas you will need to dig the hole earlier, before the ground freezes. The depth of the hole should be the measurement from the bottom of the root ball to the soil level. The width should be twice the width of the root ball. (So know the size of the tree you will purchase!)
 - Place the soil you remove in a container or tarp and store in a garage or shed until you need it to cover the planted tree. Keep the hole mulched and covered so it doesn't fill in or freeze. You might want to mark its location, too.
 - Do not add amendments only within the hole, as this will discourage the roots from reaching out. If the soil in the area is not fertile and well-drained, an area about 3 times the root ball should be amended in advance. If the soil is fertile and well-drained, amendments should not be needed.
 - If you are going to stake the tree (to prevent shifting in strong winter winds), be sure to place the stakes in the ground before the ground freezes. Stakes should be removed in the spring.

- Caring for a Live Tree
 - You may want to purchase early and tag the tree here but pick it up right before Christmas, to get the best selection and minimize the preliminary care the tree needs.
 - As soon as you get the tree home, water it immediately. From this point on, until the tree is planted, it is essential that the soil be kept moist. **DO NOT OVERWATER!** Moist soil does not mean soggy wet. Wrapping the soil ball or container with plastic may help to retain moisture.
 - Store your new tree in a consistently cool area, protected from winds, freezing temperatures and direct sunlight. This will help prevent water loss through the needles.
 - Check often to be sure the root ball does not dry out, even twice a day.
 - Once inside, keep the tree away from sources of heat such as radiators, vents or fireplaces. It will still do best in cool temperatures around 60 to 65 degrees F.

- It's best to keep the tree indoors for as brief a time as possible, not more than ten days.
- Planting your Tree Outside
 - The sooner after Christmas you can move the tree back into a cooler location, the better off the tree will be.
 - Place it in the storage area you used before Christmas, so you can maintain cool temperatures for a week and prevent the shock of frigid temperatures. Keep the soil moist during this time.
 - After a week or two the tree can be planted outdoors in its pre-dug, permanent location.
 - If this location is not well protected from winds, sun, etc., consider a temporary, sheltered planting spot until spring. A burlap windbreak around the tree could be helpful.
 - If weather is severe you may need to keep the tree stored in a very cold porch or garage until the weather changes. Avoid spots where daytime temperatures will be too warm.
 - When you get ready to plant your tree, be sure it is planted at the same depth it was grown at the nursery.
 - After putting the tree in the hole, remove any plastic and burlap. If the tree was container-grown, be sure to loosen outside roots and prune broken roots. Also redirect roots, which wrap around the soil mix so they will grow out away from the tree. Fill in the hole with the soil you have stored and heel it in firmly.
 - Use any remaining soil to build a ridge three to four inches high around the outside edge of the soil ball. This "bowl" will help you insure that all of the roots are watered properly. Remove this ridge of soil in the spring. Spraying an anti-desiccant according to label instructions may be helpful. See Ward's tree planting tips for an illustration of a correctly planted tree.
 - After the ground around the tree freezes, mulch it with three to six inches of a good mulch--shredded cedar or small bark. Keep the tree watered, especially during thaws.