

## *Selecting the Perfect Holiday Tree*

A family activity we may all enjoy is our holiday cut tree selection. Families get together to select that one tree that represents the spirit of giving.

Before shopping for that perfect tree determine where in the home the tree will be displayed. This will dictate the size of the tree to buy. South Florida's warm weather causes the cut trees to wilt quickly and drop their needles. Look for a fresh tree, the more recent the tree has been cut the better. Freshly cut trees will have good needle holding quality which will have a better chance of looking great throughout holiday weeks. To determine freshness, the needles should feel supple and springy. If the needles break the tree is not fresh. Bounce the butt of the tree on the ground and see how many needles fall. If many needles fall, the tree is old and dry. Feel the stump, the sap should be sticky and moist, not hard and caked.

Holiday cut trees usually available include spruce, firs and pines. Many consider the Douglas and Balsam Firs the ideal holiday tree. The firs have excellent needle retention and soft fragrant needles. Spruce trees have good color and stiff branches with prickly needles. Spruce trees can hold heavy ornaments, but those needles won't last long indoors. Virginia pines grown in Florida have firm branches with stiff needles that can last up to six weeks. Pines are not as fragrant as the firs.

After you have selected your tree, follow these tips to maintain color and minimize needle drop. If you buy the tree several days before it will be set up, store it outside. Cut the butt of the tree at a diagonal one inch above the original cut. Stand the tree in large bucket of water in a shady cool place. When you move the tree indoors, make a fresh cut to square off the diagonal. Place the tree in a suitable stand which contains water. In most homes a cut tree can absorb up to a quart of water a day, so keep the reservoir filled. A floral preservative or two aspirin tablets can be added to the water to help the tree stay fresh.

Take the time to properly select and care for your holiday tree investment this season. Happy Holidays!

For information on a live holiday tree variety that can be planted into the home landscape after the holidays contact the Palm Beach County Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener Volunteer Hotline at 561-233-1750.

