

Cold Climate - Care Tips

Freezing temperatures, snow, ice and chill, drying winds are enemies of freshly cut Christmas trees. The key to maintaining maximum freshness in your trees is to protect them from the elements whenever possible.

An important second step is to give your customers a few tips on what to do and what not to do to keep the tree in prime shape.

Because rainfall is normally continuous in the Northwest during the harvest period, trees coming from there are normally fresh and the limbs and needles contain a high level of moisture.

Damage to the tree potentially can occur whenever the natural moisture in the tree needles freeze.

Trees may also be damaged when cold, drying winds remove this natural moisture.

Ideally, trees awaiting sale to the consumer would be in a heat and humidity-controlled warehouse at 40-50 degrees Fahrenheit with humidity of 90 percent. Since this rarely is possible, the best substitute is to create as closely as possible this ideal condition.

Here's How You Can Keep Your Trees Fresh, Attractive And Saleable

- Set up a schedule of several shipments so that trees arrive as they are needed, preferably not before December 1.
- Store and transport trees in insulated trailers, or refrigerated units which can be set on the "wet cycle" at 38- 40 degrees Fahrenheit whenever possible.
- When trees are stored outside they should be covered with tarps, particularly in freezing weather or when cold, drying winds blow. Tree piles can be un-tarped during sunny, cold weather to allow for some heat absorption which can help keep the pile from freezing during the night.
- Freeze damage to tree needles occurs due to the rate of freezing and not to the rate of thawing. The greatest damage occurs when there is a sudden drop in temperature and water within individual cells does not

have enough time to move into the spaces outside the cell. Most freeze damage should show up within three days of thawing.

- Trees to be unloaded into freezing conditions may be better protected if the temperature in a refrigerated truck is gradually reduced (not faster than 2 degrees Celsius per hour) during transportation time to approach the projected unloading temperature. This requires very close cooperation with the trucker.
- Unless freezing conditions exist, display trees in water after making a fresh butt cut. This is good for the trees and sets an example for the customer. Trees without water remain fresh one-third to one-half as long as trees with a fresh cut in a water stand.
- To minimize exposure at night, move trees to a sheltered area and cover them with tarps.
- Always sell the oldest inventory first. "First in, first out" is the axiom of the wise tree-seller.
- If the size of tree makes it possible, encourage tree buyers to take the tree home in the car trunk to lessen exposure to freezing temperatures and the artificially created wind when the car is driven.
- Recommend that trees tied to car tops be covered with plastic (garbage bags), tarps or blankets to prevent either desiccation or the tree freezing to the car top.
- Consider carrying an inventory of garbage bags or rolls of plastic to sell or give to customers for this purpose.
- Do your customers a favor and make a fresh cut on all trees before they leave the lot. The customer then has 5-6 hours to get the tree into a water stand without the necessity of making another fresh cut.
- The inner rings of the tree are the least efficient in taking up water. Removing the outer rings of wood to fit the butt of a tree into a water stand takes away the most efficient water-carrying wood.