



Home Gardening Newsletter



December-January
2020-2021



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Horticulture News

There is Nothing Like a Real Fraser fir Christmas Tree!

There's nothing like a Real Fraser Fir Christmas Tree! With snow flying and chainsaws buzzing, a freshly cut Fraser fir emits an exceptional fragrance that brings forth fond memories from Christmas' long ago. Fraser fir is native throughout the mountains of eastern US and Canada and is produced here in WNC, as homeowners love its shape, color, strong limbs, and ability to retain its soft needles for a long time. These attributes are what makes Fraser fir "the perfect Christmas tree" for celebrating the holidays.

In 2018, consumers in the U.S. purchased 32.8 million farm-grown Christmas trees, spending an average of \$78.00 that is going back into the local economy. The Choose and Cut segment of the Christmas tree industry in particular has grown in recent years with 28% percent of the Christmas tree farms having a choose and cut component in counties adjacent to and west of Jackson County.

With children in tow, parents love the opportunity to visit a farm where they can search for that perfect tree while spending time creating new memories with their family. In doing so, individuals and family's support our local businesses. Christmas tree growers with choose and cut operations work hard but are devoted to provide a fun family experience for everyone to enjoy. In 2018, the retail value of Christmas trees sold in the U.S. was \$2.56 billion. That money is going to Christmas tree farmers instead of supporting an industry that brings you petroleum; chemicals and plastic trees where it is estimated over 85% are imported from China.



Our North Carolina Fraser fir trees provide numerous environmental and economic benefits. Christmas tree farms use land that might otherwise be developed, as its soil is not often suited for typical agricultural crops. Christmas trees help stabilize soil and protect local water supplies along with absorbing carbon dioxide and other gases. One acre of Christmas trees emits enough oxygen for 18 people. Christmas trees are considered a renewable resource as they are typically used as shelter for fish, small birds and mammals, and chipped and recycled as mulch in the spring.

Economically, Christmas trees provide an additional income for farmers and rural land-owners. They create seasonal jobs and serve as an economic stimulus for local communities, offering not only trees, but also wreaths and tourism opportunities.

Fraser fir trees are truly a green product, grown locally within our beloved mountains. With more than 850 plus Christmas tree growers on 39,000 acres here in North Carolina, it is easy to find a farm or retail lot that is close by. This year, take time this holiday season to support one of our many local farms. For more information on where to purchase Mountain Grown Fraser fir contact your local Extension Center at 828 349-2049.

Landscape Tips for the New Year

As 2020 comes to an end and the new year begins, many families and individuals enjoy the Christmas Holidays perched near their woodstove or fireplace while watching old timey Christmas movies such as "White Christmas," playing cards or exploring the latest Wii game. If you're a gardener instead of roasting chestnuts by the open fire you may be perusing seed catalogs, gardening books and contemplating outdoor landscape plans for 2021. Before making decisions about next year's garden beds, consider visiting the National Gardening Bureau's website <http://www.ngb.org>. Here you will find a fun list of the latest vegetable, herb and flower varieties for 2021. While looking over this website and others, along with catalogs too, remember to consider improved insect and/or disease resistance and watch for drought-tolerant types. Make sure to reorder successful varieties as well as those you wish to try again and order early as new and popular varieties sell out early!

As we transition into 2021, there may be lulls in the day when you find yourself dreaming of a mature home orchard, beds filled with bright vegetables colors, fragrant herbs and eye busting berries. If so, remember to take advantage of these mild spells and check on indoor and outdoor plants with the following suggestions.



Christmas trees absorb between 2 pints and 1 gallon of water per day, so make sure to check the water level daily and supply fresh water as needed. Never allow the reservoir of your Christmas tree holder to go dry as an air lock can form in the trunk that can keep the tree from absorbing water again.

Protect poinsettias from drafts and additional moisture to ensure a longer bloom time. Additional houseplants need to be turned and pruned regularly to keep them shapely. Pinch back new growth to promote bushy plants.



Plan a visit to some of our local nurseries or the Asheville Arboretum where you can observe trees and shrubs in their winter phase. Some have quite lovely shapes, handsome and distinct features and colors that may enhance your landscape.

For those who love to propagate, now is the time to take hardwood cuttings of forsythia, spirea, Japanese quince, wisteria, mock-orange, trumpet-vine and viburnum. Yews, junipers, holly, box-wood, broad-leaf evergreens, and many deciduous trees and shrubs can be propagated too. Insert evergreen cuttings in vermiculite or sand in a cool greenhouse.

On mild days, remember to water window boxes or other outside containers planted with evergreens.

Remember to mulch azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, and laurel after the ground freezes. They prefer acidic materials, such as oak leaves and pine needles, but any mixed, dry leaves or pine bark mulch will do.

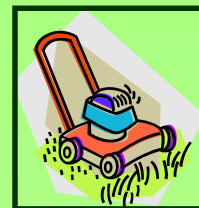
Remove snow from evergreen shrubs to prevent breaking. Tap the branches gently. If an ice storm damages your trees, prune the broken branches. If left alone, the wood fiber may not grow back, and the branch will die.



December and January Horticulture Tips

Lawns

- Depending on the weather, you may still need to mow a time or two before putting the mower away for winter.
- A mulching mower can do a good job of chopping those fallen leaves if there are not too many. Another option is to put on the bagging attachment to chop and collect the leaves. They make a good addition to the compost pile.
- Do not allow a heavy layer of leaves to smother ground covers, evergreen perennials or pansies.



Vegetables

- Remember to take advantage of the herb garden when preparing those holiday meals. In addition to flavoring, herbs can make lovely garnish or table decorations.
- Leafy greens can be harvested by pulling the whole plant, or by removing lower leaves and allowing the plant to continue to grow.
- Most of the winter vegetables, such as cabbage, broccoli and greens, do not need protection from cold temperatures until nights fall into the low 20s.
- Remove the dead ferns from the asparagus bed.
- Monitor greenhouses, cloches and cold frames daily. Temperatures heat up quickly on a sunny day.

Fruits

- Finish fall cleanup, rake leaves and remove any fruit left in trees or on the ground.
- Do not prune fruit trees until March.
- Pull weeds in the strawberry bed, but do not cover the plants with straw yet.



Ornamentals

- When planting trees and shrubs, pay attention to correct planting depth. Water well and apply a 3 inch layer of mulch, being careful to pull the mulch a few inches away from the stem.
- Check landscape beds for winter annual weeds. Remove them now as they will only be larger in the spring.
- If you love to have daffodils, crocus, iris and grape hyacinth blooming next spring, then plant now! Bulbs need to be exposed to cool temperatures to bloom. Its best to get them planted before Thanksgiving.
- To enjoy the poinsettia as long as possible, give it very little direct sunlight, keep it away from heat vents and cold drafts, and water regularly.
- Keep good pruning practices in mind when cutting holiday greenery. Make clean cuts at branch angles or leaf nodes, and keep an eye on the shape of the plant.
- Inspect house plants, especially any that spent the summer outdoors. They often carry in small insects such as scale, mealybugs, whiteflies and spider mites.
- Before bringing a live Christmas tree indoors, give it a good shake and even a good cleaning with the garden hose to remove pollen and hitchhiking insects.



Other

- This is an excellent time to send in your soil! Tests results come back quickly this time of year, allowing plenty of time to start making adjustments for next season's garden.
- Drain rain barrels. Some people simply leave the tap open for the winter, others reinstall the down spout and store the barrel.
- Along with the holiday greetings, the garden catalogs will be arriving in the mail. Start flagging your wish list pages for spring orders.

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How energy efficient is your landscape? Do you have evergreen trees or shrubs blocking a window where the sun's warmth would normally enter? Consider replacing them with deciduous plants that would let sun in during winter, but cast cooling shade in summer.

Check stored fruits and vegetables such as potatoes and apples for bad spots that may lead to decay. Remove and use those that show signs of spoiling. Separate others into slotted trays or bins to increase air circulation and reduce decay possibilities.



Add garden record keeping to the list of New Year's resolutions. As the season progresses take notes of which varieties of flowers and vegetables do best and which do poorly in your garden.

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Sincerely,
Christy Bredenkamp,
Macon County Extension Director
Horticulture & Community Development

