

# Living Christmas Tree Care Guide

Living Christmas trees have become a popular alternative to cut trees since they can be planted after the holidays and enjoyed for years to come.

## Selection & Storage

Live evergreen trees can be purchased from nurseries and garden centers with the roots and soil balled and burlapped, also known as B&B, or in a container. B&B trees will be heavier and a little more awkward to handle than a container grown tree which uses a light soil mix.

A living tree should remain outside until just before Christmas. Trees should only be inside 4 to 5 days total. Otherwise they may begin to break their winter dormancy and start to grow indoors. Find a shady location or store it on the north side of a building out of direct sunlight.

This is also a good time to pick and prepare a roomy spot for the tree's permanent home. Evergreen branches will be at least 12 to 15 feet wide at the base, and unless it's smaller stature variety, an evergreen tree can easily grow to 35 feet tall. Layer straw 6 to 8 inches deep over the site to keep the soil from freezing deeply.

## Watering

Keeping the tree's root ball or container moist before it is planted is important.

**Container-grown trees** have very efficient drainage and should be checked daily to make sure that the soil is moist. Place a large saucer underneath the container and water the tree evenly and just enough so a little water collects in the saucer.

**Burlapped trees** have heavier soil, which holds more moisture but needs more preparation. Use a large watertight container, such as a reusable



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plastic tub or large pot, filled with moist potting soil or shredded peat moss to support and insulate the root ball.

## Moving the Tree Inside

Once inside where the air is drier, check moisture levels daily. If the tree is shorter, consider elevating it on a stable structure, such as cement blocks to provide more room underneath for presents.

## Planting the Tree

When the tree is ready to be planted, move the straw and dig the hole no deeper than the ball or soil in the container and at least 12 inches wider than the ball or container to give the roots room. Remove as much of the burlap as possible and any rope or twine or the entire container. The root flare, where the base of the trunk starts to flare out, should be at ground level or slightly higher.

Water the newly planted tree well and use the straw to mulch it, which will slow the ground from freezing and allow the roots to acclimate. The first year after a tree is planted is important to its long-term success. When spring comes, plan on watering it regularly as needed to supplement rain.

### AUTHOR

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