



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Get Real! Purchase A Live Christmas Tree From A Local Farm

Air Date: November 9, 2006

'Tis the season to begin the search for the perfect Christmas tree and each holiday season, shoppers find themselves confronted with a choice: celebrate with a fresh, real tree, or one that is artificial plastic or aluminum.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management encourages Rhode Islanders to purchase live trees from local Christmas Tree Farms. Live trees are 5 times more environmentally friendly and less of a fire hazard than plastic trees¹. And, Christmas trees grown and harvested in Rhode Island provide economic benefits for local families and communities.

Environmental Benefits of Live Trees

- While they're growing, live Christmas trees absorb carbon dioxide and other gases and emit fresh oxygen. Every acre of Christmas trees produces the daily oxygen requirement for 18 people.
- The farms that grow Christmas trees stabilize soil, protect water supplies and provide refuge for wildlife while creating scenic green belts. Often, Christmas Trees are grown on soil that doesn't support other crops.
- Live Christmas trees are a renewable resource. To ensure a constant supply, Christmas Tree growers plant one to three new seedlings for every tree they harvest. (Fake trees are a petroleum-based product).
- Live Christmas trees are recyclable. The average family uses an artificial tree for only six to nine years before throwing it away, where it will remain in a landfill for centuries after disposal.



Henry's Christmas Tree Farm, Scituate

¹ National Christmas Tree Association, www.christmastree.org.

Economic Benefits of Live Trees

- U.S. consumers are expected to purchase 30 - 35 million live Christmas Trees spending \$1.4 billion
- Last year, the Christmas tree industry generated nearly \$2 Million in sales.

Finding the perfect live tree is easy with plenty of local Christmas tree farms nearby. Rhode Island has approximately 50 farms where real Christmas trees can be chosen, tagged and cut. Many also offer fresh roping, swags and wreaths along with handmade crafts for Christmas, sleigh rides, visits from Santa Claus, reindeer, hot chocolate and cookies.

Henry's Christmas Tree Farm, located in Scituate, is a great example of a local farm where families make an outing of selecting the perfect Christmas tree. A family-owned farm since 1851, Henry's has 160,000 trees on 130 acres. The farm offers approximately 10 different species of trees ranging from Balsam Firs to Blue Spruce to White Pine. Living trees, that can be re-planted after Christmas, are also available. Prices range from \$6.50 per foot for a cut tree to \$11.00 per foot for a living tree. The farm, open daily starting on December 1, includes an ornament store and offers hayrides.

Tips For Selecting A Tree At A Tree Farm

- Measure the ceiling height in the room where the tree will be displayed before you leave for the farm. The trees in the field look small when the sky is the ceiling. Don't overbuy.
- Go to the farm prepared for a day in the country. Wear comfortable shoes and old clothes. Bring rain gear if the weather is threatening. The "cutter downers" and the "loader uppers" should also have gloves.
- Saws are usually provided by the farm operator. Check ahead of time.
- Some farms measure and price their trees individually, others sell them by the foot. Ask about the pricing policy before heading out in the field.
- Cutting the tree is easiest as a two-person project. The "cutter downer" usually lies on the ground. While the helper holds the bottom limbs up.
- Bring the tree to the processing area where it will be cleaned and netted. Netting makes transporting and handling the tree substantially easier.
- Properly secure your tree in or on top of your vehicle to transport it home.



Top, a family tags their own Christmas Tree at Henry's. Below, farm guests can take tractor rides into the fields to select their trees.

Caring For The Tree At Home

- Make a fresh cut to remove about a 1/2-inch thick disk of wood from the base of the trunk before putting the tree in the stand.
- Place the tree in water as soon as possible. As a general rule, stands should provide 1 quart of water per inch of stem diameter. Devices are available that help maintain a constant water level in the stand.
- Keep trees away from sources of heat (fireplaces, heaters, heat vents, direct sunlight). Lowering the room temperature will slow the drying process, resulting in less water consumption each day.
- Monitor the tree for freshness.
- And, please recycle your tree after Christmas. For information about how to recycle your tree contact your city or town website or public works department.

For more information on where and how to find the perfect tree, visit the DEM website at www.dem.ri.gov.

Interviews:

- Pete Susi, Agricultural Marketing Specialist - DEM Division of Agriculture (Below, left with Channel 10 Reporter Lisa Purcell and Cameraman Steve Marks)
- David Henry, owner, Henry Christmas Tree Farm (Below, right)

