



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Purchase a Live Christmas Tree From a Local Farm

Date: November 20, 2009

Location: Borrelli Tree Farm, 97 Brown Ave., Johnston

'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 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.

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.

Borrelli's Christmas Tree Farm, located in Johnston, is a great example of a local farm where families make an outing of selecting the perfect Christmas tree. The farm is open weekends starting Columbus Day weekend, when shoppers can select and tag their tree, and open daily in December. The staff at Borrelli's Christmas Tree Farm will cut and shake the tree when it's ready to be taken home, and wrap it if the customer prefers to transport it home wrapped. Real Christmas trees are recyclable, for each tree harvested at Borrelli's tree farm, another tree is

planted. In addition to shoppers, wildlife enjoy spending time at the tree farm, as the trees provide oxygen for the people as well as the deer and rabbits that frequent the farm.

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.

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.

Interviewees:

Pete Susi, Agricultural Marketing Specialist - DEM Division of Agriculture spoke about the environmental and economic benefits of purchasing live trees from local farmers

Vincent and Virginia Borrelli, owners of Borrelli's Christmas Tree Farm spoke about the different species of trees available at their farm and offered tips on finding the perfect tree.