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LIVING BALLED TREE CARE

Trees **MUST** be properly maintained. For use during the Christmas season, trees should be placed in a cool spot in the house, away from heat or direct sunlight. Heat-generating electric lights should not be used for decorations. Reducing home thermostat settings a few degrees can also slow the rate of drying. Trees also have a better chance of survival if not left in the house for more than a week.

The root ball of a living Christmas tree should be kept moist (but not soaked) when out of the ground. It often helps to spray a water mist on the needles, if that can be done without getting water on undesired areas or on electrical decorations. One technique for watering living trees while they are displayed indoors is to periodically distribute crushed ice over the top of the root ball. The root ball may also be wrapped with heavy plastic with the top open while the tree remains in the house. This technique allows for watering the tree without allowing water to reach the floor or table. Care should be taken not to over-water any tree.

Before planting, the tree can be conditioned by placing it outside in a moderately cool area for a week or so. To plant, an area four to five times the size of the root ball should be tilled to a depth of 6 inches. A planting hole the same diameter and slightly shallower than the root ball is recommended. Natural burlap can be left around the roots, but treated burlap or nylon should be removed. After planting, two to three inches of mulch over the disturbed area is beneficial. The tree should be watered after planting, but fertilizer application is best done in the spring after the tree has started to grow.

The above procedures are considered the minimum required to establish a living Christmas tree into the landscape. Other cultural practices are necessary if the planted tree is to thrive in its new environment. These practices include soil management (mulching, irrigation, fertilization, etc.), insect and disease identification, evaluation and control, and periodic shaping to maintain the "Christmas tree" look. A significant amount of dedication is required by the homeowner if a living Christmas tree is to be established and grown.

However, individuals who are successful can point with pride at their efforts, which will always remind them of a past holiday season.