

Choose the Best Christmas Tree for Your Home by Learning to Identify Trees

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Many types of evergreen trees will be for sale during the holiday season as Nebraska-grown Christmas trees become increasingly available from local growers. When choosing a tree, it can be helpful and interesting to know about and be able to identify each tree type.

The overwhelming majority of Christmas trees grown and sold in Nebraska are pines. Pine trees have relatively long needles in clusters of two, three or five. The most common species of pine sold in Nebraska are Scotch, White, Austrian and Ponderosa.

Scotch and Austrian pines contain needles in bundles of two. Usually Scotch pine needles, which are about 1.5-to 3-inches long, are shorter than Austrian pine needles, which average 4 to 6 inches in length. Both trees have good needle retention and are grown throughout the state. Scotch

pines, which usually have dark green or blue-green foliage in winter, are the most popular Christmas trees grown in Nebraska.

White pines have long, soft needles that grow in clusters of five. Their feathery feel and pleasing, blue-green color make white pines a nice Christmas tree, but their availability is limited to eastern Nebraska.

Few **Ponderosa pines** are used as Christmas trees in the state. The species is native to north central and western Nebraska and looks very similar to the Austrian pine, though it may have a lighter color. The needles of the Ponderosa pine, which usually are 6-to 11-inches long, are longer than those of the Austrian pine and grow in clusters of two and three on the same tree.

Spruce and fir trees have needles attached to the twig singly and usually are shorter than pine needles, about ½-to 1-inch long. To distinguish between spruce and fir trees, strip the needles from a small branch. If the needles leave small

knobs on the twig, the tree is a spruce. If the needles leave small depressions on the bark, the tree is a fir. Another way to distinguish between spruce and fir trees is to roll a needle between two fingers. Spruce needles are square or oval, so they roll easily. Fir needles are flat and more difficult to roll. Spruce needles are stiffer and blunter than those of firs.

Blue and Norway spruces are the two most common types of spruce trees grown as Christmas trees in Nebraska. They usually have good form, a pleasing odor and dense foliage. Blue spruces usually are bluer in color, while the Norway spruce is darker green. Both trees can be fairly expensive and lose their needles more quickly than pines in warm rooms.

Each year more fir trees are grown by Nebraska Christmas tree producers, but generally only in eastern Nebraska. The most common fir trees grown in Nebraska are **concolor fir, balsam fir and Douglas fir**, although Douglas fir is not a true fir species. Fir trees gener-

ally have a narrow form and good color, density and needle retention.

Junipers tend to be the easiest type of evergreen to identify. Juniper needles are very short, awl-shaped and quite prickly to the touch. Eastern redcedar, which is native to eastern Nebraska, and Rocky Mountain juniper, which is native to western Nebraska, are sometimes cut for Christmas trees.

Junipers tend to vary widely in form and color and have a strong odor. In winter, Eastern redcedar trees usually are a dark purple-green color and Rocky Mountain junipers stay blue-green. Their foliage holds well, but the twigs are thin and may not support heavy ornaments. Although junipers usually are not sold as Christmas trees, native trees often can be cut with a landowner's permission.

For more information about finding Nebraska-grown Christmas trees, visit the Nebraska Christmas Tree Growers Directory at <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/pub/apd/trees.htm>.



Scotch pine



Austrian pine



Eastern white pine



Blue spruce



Norway spruce



Balsam fir



Concolor (or white) fir



Douglas fir



Eastern redcedar (commonly called a juniper)

Nebraska-Friendly Landscapes Clinic, Nov. 16

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension presents a series of programs, entitled Acreage Insights-Rural Living Clinics, targeting acreage owners and specifically designed to provide knowledge and skills to better manage a rural living environment.

The final clinic in 2006, Nebraska-Friendly Landscapes, will be held on Thursday, Nov. 16, 7-9 p.m. at the Lancaster Extension Education Cen-

ter, 444 Cherrycreek Road in Lincoln.

Nebraska-friendly landscapes enhance our living area by conserving and protecting water resources, providing biodiversity in plantings, conserving energy and more. Learn design principles, plant placement, maintenance, and plants for a Nebraska-friendly landscape. Extension Educator Kelly Feehan will present the clinic.

The same workshop will

also be presented:

- Omaha on Nov. 13, 7-9 p.m.
- Fremont, Nov. 18, 9-11 a.m.
- Columbus, Nov. 9, 7-9 p.m.
- Grand Island, Nov. 6, 7-9 p.m.

Pre-registration is \$10 per person, and must be received 3 working days before the program. Late registration is \$15 per person. For more information and registration form, go to <http://acreage.unl.edu>, or call Sarah Browning at (402) 727-2775.

