

Living Christmas Tree Care

Living Christmas trees can provide years of service if you follow a few basic principles. To keep your tree green and beautiful throughout the holiday season (and after!), you need to pay special attention to its growing conditions. This care sheet will help you to keep your tree happy and healthy. Note: During the holidays, the plastic nursery pot it comes in will do just fine while indoors. Be sure you have a sturdy saucer to protect your floor.

Bringing the Tree Indoors:

Before you bring your tree indoors, give it a good, thorough water soaking. While watering, hose off the foliage to knock out any old needles, insects, dust and dirt. Once foliage is dry, spray it with an anti-transpirant. An anti-transpirant, when applied, cuts down on water loss through the needles while your tree is in the warm, dry indoor environment.

Select an area that gets strong light but not direct sun and is away from artificial heat sources such as heater vents and fireplaces. Watch your floor. Put newspapers or something under the saucer on the floor. (You might consider a rolling plant dolly to help move your tree around the house or patio. This saves your back and the flooring.)

Your tree should only be kept indoors from 7 to 10 days. Any longer than that and your tree could suffer damage. While indoors, your tree should be kept moist. (tip: placing ice cubes periodically on top of the soil will provide a gentle soaking as the cubes melt. This can make for a happier tree.)

Growing in a Container:

Where you decide to grow your tree will dictate what type of temporary or permanent container you will need.

The container should be at least four inches larger in diameter than the existing container or root ball, and should have good drainage. (That plant dolly would come in handy now).

Use well-draining potting soil such as **Sloat Organic Potting soil**. Good soil to start with will prevent problems later. Use **E.B. Stone Sure Start** according to the packaging directions to stimulate root growth. (Pines and spruce prefer an acidic soil such as **E.B. Stone Azalea, Camellia and Gardenia Planting Mix**).

Living trees in containers outdoors should be grown in an area that receives full sun. Try and protect your tree from prevailing winds. Container trees need frequent watering, but be sure not to overwater. Check soil often (top 2" - 3" should be moist). If soil is dry, run water until water runs through the drainage hole of pot. Do not leave in standing water.

Fertilize monthly with a water-soluble fertilizer such as Maxsea Acid formula. If you can't fertilize on a regular basis, try a slow release fertilizer such as Osmocote, which feeds over a 4-month period.



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Planting in the Garden:

Plant your tree in a sunny spot with lots of room around it. Dig a hole twice as wide and as deep as the root ball. If soil is dry, fill the hole with water and let it drain first. Put excavated soil aside.

Soil removed from hole: Add 50% **Sloat Bay Area Blend Planting Mix or Sloat Forest Mulch Plus**. Mix thoroughly.

Add **E.B. Stone Sure Start** to planting hole according to package directions. Place your tree in the hole and fill with enough of the amended soil that the top of the root ball is slightly above your existing grade when tree is inside.

Loosen the roots (what we call “roughing the root ball” prior to planting). This allows roots to travel outward into the new soil instead of continuing to grow in a circular pattern as they were in the pot.

With the rest of the excavated soil, create a basin around the tree on soil surface to keep water surrounding the tree when watering.

Place more planting mix or **Sloat Forest Mulch Plus** around the base as mulch to conserve water. (Keep mulch away from tree trunk).

Watering:

Correct watering is also key to a healthy and happy tree. These instructions are a general guide and should be modified based on weather in your area, soil type, etc.

Water tree thoroughly when planting. For the first 6 weeks, water once or twice a week (unless we're having monsoon weather, at which point you can lighten up a bit). Gradually lengthen the interval between waterings. Once the tree is established (usually one season), water every 2 weeks if sandy soil or every 3 to 4 weeks if heavy clay soil.

Fertilize your new tree on a regular basis using **E.B. Stone Tree and Shrub or E.B. Stone Azalea, Camellia, Gardenia** food.

Pruning:

If you want to, pinch new side growth twice a year (March and May, never later than July or August). This will keep the tree in shape for many seasons to come.

Pests:

Pine and spruce trees can be attacked by some common garden pests. Aphids, scale and mites are the most frequent visitors.

These can be controlled on small container trees with a ready-to-use type spray. Usually 1 to 2 applications will control these insects if caught at an early stage. On mature trees, a tank-type or hose-end sprayer must be used along with a spray that is suitable to kill the pest.

If you are ever in doubt about the health of your tree, bring a sample of the affected foliage (in a plastic bag, please) to any of our Sloat locations and let a Sloat professional make recommendations to get your tree back in shape.