Holiday Trees

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It is time to select a holiday tree to decorate to celebrate Christmas and New Year’s Day. Coincidentally this is also one of the best times of the year to plant trees in the landscape. With the availability of sheared and naturally shaped conifers with their roots still attached, you can accomplish both goals with a single purchase.

Area nurseries have several tree varieties from which to choose if you want to take advantage of this situation.

For sheared trees look for Aleppo pine or Italian stone pine, both are attractive holiday trees and will prosper in the landscape in our alkaline soil and patterns of drought followed by rainy weather. Plant them in full sun.

 Many of the Aleppo pines planted close together on Kelly AFB in San Antonio grew straight and tall, but typically, the Aleppo pine grows in a sprawled open shape to about 40 feet tall and 20 feet wide. It has a moderate growth rate.

Italian stone pine is also called umbrella pine because at maturity it has a rounded crown on a straight trunk. The species grows slowly to 45ft in our area but may grow to 100ft in ideal conditions. . The trunk is attractive with plates of orange-colored bark.

Rosemary and Japanese blueberry are not conifers but they make attractive sheared plants that can be decorated for the holidays and planted afterward in the landscape.

Among those species of conifers that have a natural conical shape that can be used for a living holiday tree are Arizona cypress, deodar cedar, and some of the ornamental junipers.

Arizona cypress has a bluish-green foliage. They are very drought tolerant and the dense crown is a favorite source of cover for birds. Some books say Arizona cypress grows rapidly to 90 ft. tall but in my experience in Central Texas landscapes, the species grows at a moderate rate (2ft. per year) to about 40 ft. tall with a base that is 20ft across.

Deodar cedar grow to 40 ft. tall. The gray green foliage hangs on the long pendulous branches in a very attractive configuration. The one issue with deodar is its cold sensitivity. Many of the mature plants have had their peak frozen back. The tree is still functional and attractive but the top is flattened. With climate change, that may not be an issue for newly planted trees.

A number of the ornamental junipers have attractive conical shapes that also work well as a holiday tree. Select the variety that meets your idea of a holiday tree and will grow to the mature size that will meet your landscape needs.

Using a live plant as a Christmas tree and then a landscape tree works best if you do some planning. The trees with roots are heavy so have plenty of help and a 2-wheel cart available to move it from the vehicle to its holiday spot and then to its permanent home in the landscape.

Minimize the amount of time that the tree serves as Christmas tree to 3 weeks if possible. It will have to be watered in its container so it will have to be placed on a tray or on the porch.

Dig the planting hole to the depth of the plants root system and 2 to 3 times as wide as the container. Watering in the tree and mulching over the root system is particularly important. For detailed information on planting the living tree after its stint as a holiday decoration, visit plantanswers.com.