

Living Christmas Trees for House and Landscape
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It is the best time of the year to plant trees in the landscape and most of us decorate a tree for the Holidays. Some retail nurseries offer trees that can perform both roles. They can be planted in the landscape after they complete their assignment as the decorated holiday tree.

Not every tree can do the double duty. They must have a Christmas tree shape (or be amenable to shearing) and, of course, they must have their root system intact and be well adapted so they survive when planted in the landscape.

Consider Aleppo pine, deodora cedar, Italian stone pine, Japanese black pine and Arizona cypress for a tree that will eventually become a major addition to the landscape. "Blue point" juniper and sheared rosemary are smaller choices that will also do the job.

Using a tree in a container for a holiday tree requires some forethought and planning.

They are heavy, so you need to line up the help at home to get the tree off of the truck and to the site where it will be decorated.

For best results the tree should only be in the house for two weeks, but it can be left in its container and either stored or decorated outside for a longer spell. Keeping the soil moist is essential during this time.

After its stint as a decorated tree, it will have to be moved to the planting site. The hole should be as deep as the container and wider than the container for an easy fit.

Wait to fertilize until next year when the tree has recovered from transplanting and has started to put on new growth. Soak the hole and root ball by letting the hose run slowly into the root ball until the hole fills up. The list of trees provided are well adapted so they will survive in our native soils. Finish the planting by covering the root ball with 4 inches of mulch. Leaves work well as mulch. Re-water the tree every time the soil dries under the mulch.

Aleppo pine grows to 40 or 50 feet tall. It has the classic pine shape of a straight bole and open branching.

Deodora cedar is a true cedar; it has a blue-green foliage color and the branches weep at the ends. It is attractive as a lawn tree but in years past, the top would sometimes die back in a cold spell in the winter. Perhaps with global warming that isn't as likely to happen? Even with the frozen top removed, Deodora cedar makes an attractive 30 ft. lawn tree.

Japanese black pine grows out of its sheared state to form a broad-topped tree of about 30 feet tall.

Italian stone pine also forms a round-topped tree as it grows older. In our area the Italian stone pine seems to grow to 25 feet tall.

Arizona cypress is available in several selections differentiated by needle color. The foliage can be almost blue. The species makes a broad conical shaped tree with dense foliage that is attractive to birds for shelter and nesting.

“Blue Point” juniper grows to 7 feet tall and generally maintains its columnar shape. It is excellent to use as a foundation plant or as part of the shrub border after the Holidays.

Sheared rosemary will eventually revert to its squat shrubby state if it is planted in a container or in the ground in full sun. It is an herb that provides foliage for flavoring recipes and is a good evergreen landscape plant. Deer do not eat the foliage.