

Dual Use Holiday Trees

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Do you like to check out ways to save some money while meeting your needs? Using a “Living” Christmas Tree for holiday decorations and then planting it in the landscape is one of those opportunities.

Tree varieties that fit the dual role include Arizona cypress, Aleppo pine, Deodora cedar, Japanese black pine, Italian stone pine and blue point juniper. Rosemary is also popular plant to decorate. In the case of rosemary, the sheared plant can be maintained in a container or planted in the soil. The trees have a natural shape or are sheared to a shape that meets the expectations of a Holiday tree for decoration. After the Holiday period they can be planted in the landscape to provide a long-lived attractive evergreen.

Avoid the acid-loving pines such as the Virginia and loblolly pines! They won't last long in our alkaline soil. Afghan pines grow well in alkaline soil but are susceptible to a life-shortening fungal dieback. Do not plant them either.

Arizona cypress is available in several selections generally differentiated by foliage color. The foliage can be almost blue. The species makes a broad conical shaped tree with thick foliage that is attractive to birds for cover and nesting. It is often used as a key part of xeriscape plantings in San Antonio.

Aleppo pine grows to 40 or 50 feet tall. It has the classic pine shape with a straight bole and open branching. It is the pine tree that is extensively planted at Kelly AFB.

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 the past the top would sometimes die back in a winter cold spell. Maybe with climate change that won't happen anymore! Even with the frozen top removed, it makes an attractive lawn tree at about 30 feet tall.

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 grow to 25 feet tall. They require a well-drained site to prosper.

“Blue Point” juniper grows to 7 feet tall and maintains its columnar shape. Use it as a foundation plant or as part of the shrub border.

Identify the tree you want at your favorite retail nursery based on the role it will eventually play as a permanent part of the landscape. Trees that have a root ball are heavy so have enough help and equipment on hand to put it in place for decorating and then to move it to the pre-dug planting hole after the decoration period.

The trees do best if they are only inside a structure for 2 weeks so make that part of the plan. One of the best options is to set them up for decoration outside on the patio or porch. Remember that the tree will also have to be watered so a tray to catch the water under the container will be required.

In the landscape, select a final planting site in full sun. Dig the hole to the depth of the root ball and twice as wide. Refill the hole with the native soil. Do not waste your money on unnecessary soil additives. Place 3 to 4 inches of mulch over the root system and water when the soil under the mulch dries to 1 inch. Fertilize with a cup of slow release lawn fertilizer (19- 5-9) every February. Spread it over the entire root system and beyond the root system by 1 foot.