



# Garden Talk

## Living Trees @ Christmas

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There is a dramatic increase in the interest of living Christmas trees. The landscape of a new home is always enhanced by the structured beauty of a majestic tree that will adorn the landscape for generations regardless the season. While the altitude determines the types of evergreens that will grow best, certain techniques guarantee indoor enjoyment of a tree and its eventual transition to a life out of doors.

**Types of Trees** - The popularity of living Christmas trees has resulted in extensive selections displayed at local garden centers. Area favorites are Colorado Blue Spruce - with its perfectly tiered shape, Austrian Pine - which resembles a mini Ponderosa Pine, and Alberta Spruce - cute, cuddly and bushy. Traditional or unconventional, any tree can be decorated and enjoyed as an ornament before it becomes a planted addition to a landscape.

**How Long** - Living Christmas trees can be safely kept indoors 7-10 days. It is important not to exceed this time as the outdoor survivability of the tree can be affected. Trees that stand taller than six feet should adhere to the shorter time indoors. Many people decorate a tree and simply leave it on the deck, patio, or outside entryway throughout the holiday season.

**Preparation** - Before bringing it inside it's important that the tree be kept well-watered. While the tree is outside and still in its container, be sure to water it every 2-3 days for adequate hydration. Do not worry about the cold. These plants like it when it's bitterly cold. Their struggle comes when they contend with warm indoor temperatures.

**Placement** - Situate living trees at least 10 feet from a wood stove or fireplace. Keep away from heat ducts that blow directly on it, and avoid placement in a sunny window.

**Watering** - Keep the root ball moist while in the house. Ice cubes are ideal for watering living trees while they're indoors. The ice melts releasing a slow, but constant sup-



ply of water, rather like an artificial drip system. To protect your floors from possible water damage, buy a clear vinyl saucer or plastic sheet to put under the grower's container.

**Decorations & Lights** - Dress your living Christmas tree with your favorite decorations. Lights should be the small miniatures or LED types. They create a very bright light without releasing heat. Do not use spray snow that adheres to the needles.

**After Christmas** - Set the tree in an unheated garage or carport for at least a week. This allows the plant to re-acclimate to the cold outdoors. Keep trees hosed-off and watered during this time. Be sure to remove the saucer to allow for drainage.

**Planting Instructions** - Pick a nice sunny day to plant this holiday treasure. Plant like any other time of year, but remember stakes are essential to keep trees upright. The weight of snow can cause these trees to fall over, especially Junipers, Cypress, and Pines. Dig the hole the same depth as the root ball, but three times as wide. Use mulch to keep soil loose around the roots. Pack soil firmly with your foot to eliminate air pockets. Top dress the roots with a 2-3 inch layer of mulch to insulate and retain moisture. You must water once every two weeks until sometime in March when warm daytime temps return.

To submit comments or questions about living Christmas trees visit Ken's web site at [www.wattergardencenter.com](http://www.wattergardencenter.com), or Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/watters1815](http://www.facebook.com/watters1815)

**WattersGardenCenter.com**

1815 W. Iron Springs Road,  
Prescott, AZ 86305

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