

# Ernest Gay cautions: Take care in selecting trees

By CHARLOT M. DENMON  
Staff Writer

Selecting the proper Christmas tree is not as easy as most people think it is. To help those who purchase live trees for their Christmas celebration, Ernest Gay offers these suggestions.

Know how high the ceiling is in your home so you can select the right height tree. Bound the tree. If a lot of needles fall off, the tree is not fresh. Check the buds to be sure they are fresh and bend some of the needles. If the needles don't break, the tree is fresh.

Gay and his family, of Orange, have been in the business of selling Christmas trees for the past 25 years and know what makes a fresh tree.

Ernest Gay II is now in charge of the family Christmas tree farm and with the help of his sons, Ernie and Art, does the planting and harvesting of the trees.

Gay sells only blue spruce trees which he says are among the most popular in this part of the country. Recently, he has had people

looking for Douglas Fir and, said he has planted some of this variety but it will be at least eight years before they are big enough to cut.

"We have the same families return year after year to select a real tree," said Gay. "Those families buying a real tree appear to run in cycles. When they are young or have young children, they come for real trees. When their children have left home we don't see them, then when they have grandchildren, we see the old familiar faces."

Gay said most people want a seven or eight-foot tree if they live in the Back Mountain area because many of the homes have high ceilings. People who come out from the city, however, usually want a tree about five or six feet because they live in apartments with only eight-foot ceilings.

Gay does not wholesale trees but allows buyers to select a tree and, if they desire, cut it themselves. He also cuts some trees and has them on hand for those who do not want to climb up the side hill of his farm to cut a tree.



## It's almost tree time again

Ernie Gay II and his son, Art, take time out from tagging Christmas trees to pose for a photo. The field where they're standing is where Gay planted Douglas Fir trees this year.

Dallas Post/Charlot M. Denmon

"Most people who come to our place make a day of it," he said. "They usually come

with the entire family and the tree they select must please everyone," said Gay.

Gay usually starts cutting trees on Thanksgiving weekend since tree sales begin the

week after Thanksgiving, although he said a few people have already been out to select trees.

Gay's Christmas Tree Farm has 20 acres of trees and each year the sales average in the hundreds. The color and fragrance of the blue spruce makes it popular with most people, according to Gay. It is also sturdier for trimming than some of the other varieties.

Gay said that Canada ships a large volume of trees into this country but most of them are Canadian Balsam and are usually cut in early fall, making them more likely to lose needles faster. At a recent seminar Gay attended, it was reported that artificial trees were cutting into the real tree market but Gay said he doesn't see much difference in his sales.

"We average about the same volume each year," he said. "Most people like to choose and cut their own tree. It's important that they have a fresh tree and usually husband and wife take a long time to decide on exactly the right tree for their home."

## Tree growers offer interesting facts

Here are some interesting facts about fresh Christmas trees from the Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Assn.

— The state of Pennsylvania is known as the "Christmas Tree State."

— Average height of tree purchased by families is 5' to 7'.

— Most consumers select their trees at the first "choose and cut" plantation or retail lot visited and return to the same supplier year after year.

— A developing trend is the purchase of two or more trees per family. In some cases, the second tree is for a child's room or rec room. In others, a tree is given to an elderly friend or relative who may not have the energy to go alone (ala 'Grandparents Tree').

— Most fresh tree buyers are exceptionally zealous in their

celebration of Christmas. They exchange gifts, send cards, hang stockings and enjoy festive Christmas dinners and entertaining.

— This year, the Pennsylvania State Museum, Harrisburg, is exhibiting 30 Christmas trees decorated in the traditions of each ethnic group in the state.

— Mr. Eric Sundback, a member of the Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Assn., will supply the official White House Tree in 1988.

— Tree seedlings spend two to five years in a nursery before they're planted in the field.

— Time consuming and spe-

cial measures, like shearing and pruning, help achieve better tree forms and shapes. This process is completed during the summer months.

— Typically, a 6 foot tree is 10 or 11 years old when it is cut for sale.

— Trees grown on the West Coast...and shipped east are likely to experience their first hard frost enroute, with premature needle drop when placed in a Pennsylvania home. Canadian trees, generally cut in October before frost strikes, are not as

fresh as locally grown trees cut on the spot or just before they are placed on the lot for sale.

The Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Association is a non-profit organization whose members are devoted to the production, promotion and marketing of natural evergreen trees. To contact a grower in your area, to further develop any of the above topics, or simply acquire more information about the industry, contact the Association at (717) 292-5683.

## Singers will entertain

The New Community Singers, under the direction of Shirley Mahle and accompanied by Elaine St. Claire, are sponsoring a series of Christmas programs throughout the Wyoming Valley.

The chorus will entertain at the Festival of Trees at Genetti's on Sunday, November 30 and at the Holiday Fair at the Luzerne County Courthouse Sunday, December 7.

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