CUTTING YOUR OWN CHRISTMAS TREE: A FAMILY TRADITION

(4-minute read)

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Few holiday traditions rival the magic of visiting a local farm, breathing in the crisp winter air, and bringing home a fresh, real Christmas tree. However, finding "the one" and getting it home safely requires a bit of strategy.

At NUTEC, we spend our days planning spaces, selecting the right materials, and designing for how things will hold up over time, and it turns out the same principles apply to the perfect tree. Planning your space, picking the right species, testing for freshness, and executing a clean saw cut are the essential steps to securing a beautiful tree that lasts all season.

Here's how to approach your family's tree-cutting tradition with the eye of an Architect, the precision of an Engineer, and the care of a Landscape Architect.

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1. Dream Big, Measure First

Before you even leave the house, you need to know exactly how much room you have:

- **Measure twice:** Record your ceiling height and the floor width of the tree's designated spot.
- **Account for hardware:** Subtract 6 to 12 inches from your ceiling height to leave room for the tree stand and your tree topper.
- **Check the base:** Verify the diameter of your stand to ensure the trunk of your tree will fit your stand.
- **Avoid heat:** Choose a spot away from radiators, fireplaces, and sunny windows to prevent your tree from drying out prematurely.

2. Pick the Right Species for Your Home

Different trees offer distinct advantages depending on your style, ornament collection, and allergies:

Tree Species	Best For...	Key Characteristics
Fraser Fir	Heavy Ornaments Longevity	Stout, sturdy branches; excellent needle retention; beautiful silver-green hue.
Douglas Fir	Traditionalists	Soft needles; sweet fragrance; classic, full, fluffy silhouette.
Noble Fir	Layered Look	Rich color; deeply tiered, robust branches that handle large decor with ease.
White Pine	Allergy Sufferers	Soft, flexible needles; very low fragrance profile.

Check with the farm before you go to confirm when they are open and what varieties of trees they have. Smaller farms often have trees of exceptional quality but may have a limited selection of species. Larger farms may have more exotic varieties, but it may be harder to find the one that is right for your space.

3. Inspect for Freshness

Whether you're walking the fields or navigating a local lot, use your senses to check a tree's health:

- **The Hand Test:** Gently run your hand down a branch. The needles should feel flexible and stay securely attached to the twig.

- **The Shake Test:** Grab the trunk of the tree and give it a vigorous shake. While a few brown interior needles dropping is completely normal winter shedding, a shower of green needles means the tree is already dehydrated.

- **The Eye Test:** Look for vibrant color, a straight trunk, and check to make sure there are no visible signs of pest or beetle damage.



4. How to Cut Like a Pro

If you are at a "choose-and-cut" farm, cutting the tree is much easier as a two-person job. Here are a few tips for a safe, clean cut:

- **Gear up:** Wear sturdy gloves and close-fitting clothes to avoid getting snagged. Bring a sharp bow saw if the farm doesn't provide one.

- **Position properly:** Have one person crawl or kneel underneath to handle the saw, while the helper holds the lower limbs up out of the way.

- **Clear the bind:** As the cutter saws low to the ground (aiming for a 2-to-3-inch stump), the helper should apply light tugging pressure to the side of the tree *opposite* the cut. This keeps the saw kerf open, so the blade doesn't bind or get stuck.

- **Cut straight:** Make a clean, flat cut straight through the trunk. Avoid cutting at an angle, as a slanted base makes it incredibly difficult to balance safely in a stand.

5. Getting It Home & Keeping It Alive

The work doesn't stop once the tree is down. Follow these post-cut rules to preserve your holiday centerpiece:

- **The Ride Home:** Shake out any loose debris or hitchhiking bugs at the farm. Tie the tree securely to your vehicle with the **trunk facing forward** to minimize wind damage to the branches during the drive.

- **The Rehydration Race:** Once home, if the tree has been cut for more than 4 hours, saw off a fresh 0.5 to 1-inch slice from the bottom. This reopens the sealed capillaries so the tree can drink.

- **Water Daily:** Plunge it immediately into a stand filled with plain, clean water. A real tree can drink several quarts of water in its first few days, so check the reservoir multiple times daily to ensure the water line never drops below the base of the trunk.

Making it a Family Tradition

The perfect Christmas tree isn't necessarily the fullest, tallest, or most expensive one at the farm. It's the one that brings your family together and becomes part of your holiday story. So, bundle up, enjoy the search, and embrace the tradition. The memories you make in the field will last far longer than the tree itself.

At NUTEC, we believe the best designs, are the ones people gather around and enjoy for years to come. If you're dreaming up a project of your own in the new year, our Architects and Engineers are ready to help you plan it.

Happy holidays from all of us at NUTEC!

