

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
Caring for Your Living Christmas Tree

A living Christmas tree can be a gift to your landscape in addition to honoring the tradition of Christmas in your home. If you receive a tree as a gift or purchase one, here are a few tips to help it make a successful transition into the landscape after the holiday season.

First, select a tree that will adapt to our Central Texas clay/alkaline soil. Dr Doug Welsh, horticulturist at Texas A&M, recommends these specific trees for Central Texas: Arizona cypress, Deodar cedar, Eastern red cedar, Eldarica pine, Italian stone pine, Leyland cypress, or Nellie R. Stevens holly.

After you have selected your tree, keep it in the house no longer than 2 weeks. During this time keep it moist and in bright light. After Christmas plant it as soon as possible. This will give it time to establish its root system and it will be ready to grow in the spring.

Choose a site for your tree that receives full sunlight. Dig a hole no deeper than the pot and twice as wide as the root ball. Save the excavated soil. Water the tree while still in the pot and water the excavated hole. Remove the tree from the pot and tease its root to discourage it from continuing to grow in a vase shape. Plant the tree using the excavated soil. **Do not** add amendments of any kind; use the native soil you removed from the hole.

Form a berm of soil around the newly planted tree to help retain water and remember to mulch. Water regularly. If you must stake your tree, use 2 stakes and tie the tree loosely so that it is still able to sway in the wind. Movement will strengthen the trunk. Remove the stakes after one year or sooner.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

In the photo: Once an indoor "living Christmas tree," this Arizona cypress is a tall and handsome addition to the landscape. Its reddish, rugged trunk and exfoliating bark are pleasing elements to this drought tolerant tree. It can thrive in the landscape with little care and its silvery-gray foliage is a nice contrast to other evergreen plants.

