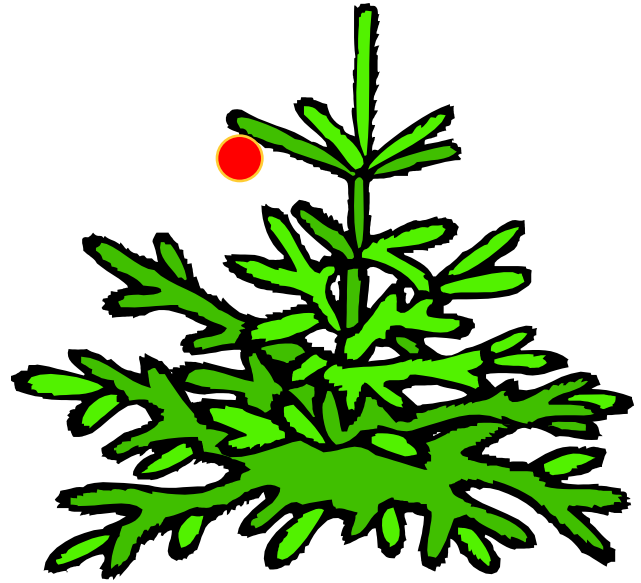


Caring for Black or White Spruce Christmas Trees



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Miscellaneous Publication: MP-88-3
Reformatted for Web viewing 12/03

Interior Alaska's black and white spruces make excellent Christmas trees, but they need proper care to remain fresh, attractive, and safe throughout the holiday season. Here are some tips on how you can enjoy your tree for as long as possible.

Cutting

As temperatures are normally below zero in December, extra care should be taken when cutting down your tree to ensure that you do not break off any branches. At these cold temperatures, the twigs and branches of both spruce species become brittle and can be broken quite easily. To prevent this, don't allow the tree to fall to the ground when you cut it, and don't drag it over the snow to your vehicle. Also try to avoid any unnecessary bending of the branches.

Home Care

A number of solutions have been used to keep the needles on a tree once it is brought indoors. Researchers at the School of Agriculture and Land Resources Management have compared the needle retention of both black and white spruce with three solutions: water only; water and chlorine bleach; and a water, chlorine bleach, and corn syrup combination. Of these, the trees in plain water exhibited the best needle retention, with black spruce averaging 17 days and white spruce 25 days before moderate needle loss occurred. Moderate needle loss occurred in both spruce species in both the other solutions after only 7 days.

Our researchers also found that needle retention for both species and for all solutions was enhanced by a moist environment. Such an environment can be obtained by using a humidifier in the room in which the tree is located. Also, the tree should be located away from heat sources.

Before putting the tree in its stand, cut an inch or two off the butt end. This fresh cut will allow the tree to take up water more readily. Be sure to maintain an adequate water level in the stand at all times. As fresh trees take up water rapidly, check the water two hours after setting up the tree. Then check the water level at least once daily thereafter to see that the bottom of the tree trunk is *always* covered.