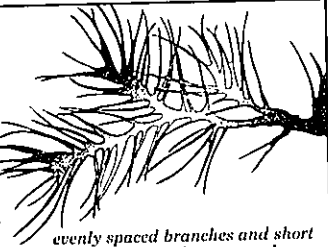


## Top tree tips

### Choosing the perfect fresh tree

Those who set out to find the perfect tree should remember that the fresher the tree is to begin with, the fewer problems they will encounter later.

- Look for brightly colored, pliable (as opposed to brittle) and lush needles — telltale signs that trees are cut fresh, rather than chopped down and stored months in advance.
- Whether you purchase your tree directly from a tree farm, a corner lot or other retail store, make sure that the trees are displayed on raised platforms as opposed to pavement and are kept well-watered and out of direct sunlight.
- When selecting a particular tree, consider your ceiling height and the amount of space you have to display the tree.
- Generally, people find full, symmetrical trees most attractive, so step back and circle the tree, looking for bare spots and assessing its overall appeal. The trunk should also be straight enough to stand upright in a stand. Keep in mind that even the most beautiful, natural trees will not be perfect.
- Following is a rundown of some of the most popular varieties of Christmas trees. Personal taste and your decorating style will determine the right one for you. Also, think about the amount, size and weight of the ornaments and lights you plan to use. Douglas firs have



evenly spaced branches and short needles that tend to stay on long after the tree is cut. Scotch and white pines: long-needle varieties with the traditional, attractive cone shape. Blue spruce: an indigo-tinted pine with a nice look, but loses its needles relatively quickly.

- Once the chosen tree has been hauled home, place it immediately in a pail of water and out of direct sun or freezing cold until you're ready to bring it indoors.
- Before placing it in a tree stand, 1 or 2 inches should be cut off the bottom, so that the tree can draw water up into the trunk and remain fresh longer.
- To keep it from drying out prematurely, take care not to set it up close to heat sources like fireplaces, heaters or heat vents. Check and fill the stand with water frequently. A tree needs a lot of moisture.
- Before you begin to decorate, make sure the tree is firmly in the stand and sturdy enough to ride out the entire season.

Source: Copley News Service

# Give parties holiday sparkle

BY RENEE M. SKOGLUND  
SPECIAL WRITER

Every host wants to give a Christmas party that intimately reflects the joy of

the season and lingers long in the memories of your guests. Here are a few suggestions.

Who says the china must match? For a formal dinner, provide each guest with his or her own "look" by setting the table with different place settings and stemware borrowed from friends and relatives. Wrap the napkins in different colored ribbons.

If you're serving a buffet, arrange the food and decorations at varying heights. Create topiary trees of cookies, truffles and appetizers anchored with toothpicks. "Adding staggered height to a table makes it much more interesting," said Lori Carollo of Plymouth, owner of Piccadilly's, a home and garden accessory store located in

Plymouth's Old Village.

Serving champagne? Carollo suggests creating your own ice bucket. Fill a 2-liter plastic bottle with pen rocks and place it in a small plastic pail. Layer the pail with flowers, adding water and freezing until the pail is almost filled. When ready, unmold the ice form and insert the champagne bottle. Your guests will marvel at the effect. (Ribbons and glitter also work quite nicely in the ice bucket, Carollo said.)

Piccadilly's specializes in holiday decor, and Carollo and her partner Paul Bezaire delight in providing hosts with party suggestions. Bezaire, who moved to Plymouth from Hollywood in 1989, used to be the florist for such movie stars as Ann-Margret and Liberace.

### Holiday decor

Besides creating holiday floral swags,

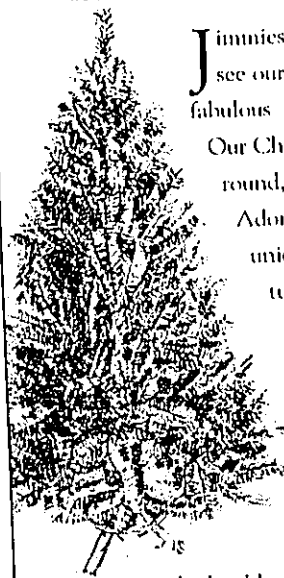
See PARTIES, A16

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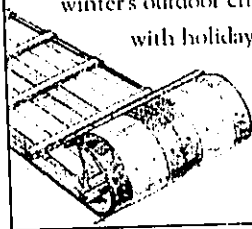
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