

Tests Tell Freshness Of Yule Trees

LANSING — Bend its needles. Bump it on the ground. That's how to find out if that Christmas tree you're going to buy will stay fresh through the holidays.

"If the needles bend easily and don't fall when you bump the tree, the tree is fresh," contends Lester E. Bell, Michigan State University extension forester.

"Some pines, spruce, for example, do not retain their needles well. This is characteristic of the species and does not necessarily reflect a lack of freshness."

"Disregard brown needles that fall when the tree is bumped. They are merely remnants of the normal shedding process."

"Feel the bottom of the stump — on fresh trees it feels sappy moist."

ADDITIONAL information can be obtained

free by writing the Department of Forestry, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich. 48823 for the booklet, "Buying Your Christmas Tree."

There are a number of things you can do to keep your Christmas tree fresh and attractive. If you don't plan to set up the tree immediately, Bell advises that it can be placed in a cool, shaded area well sheltered from the wind, with the base in a bucket of water.

"Just before putting the tree in its stand, you should cut off an inch or two from the base of the trunk," he says. "This will allow the tree to take up water more readily."

A tree stand filled with water will help prevent needle drop and will greatly increase the tree's fire resistance, notes the MSU expert.



GRACIOUS LIVING room has been topped off with an entirely new type of ceiling tile from Armstrong. The furnishings of this elegant room are eclectic. Note the harmonious contrasts of the modern print draperies, shag carpet, and ceiling tile with the period furniture and antiques, such as the quaint Viennese coffee urn. The tile was cemented to the existing ceiling, then the false beams added for the coffered (recessed) look.

VA Offers Home Buying Counseling

A home-buying counseling service is being offered to veterans by the Veterans Administration. It will begin Dec. 14 at the VA regional office in Detroit at 801 W. Baltimore.

Pilot programs in Los Angeles and Baltimore have been highly successful. While the program is aimed at minority group veterans, all veterans are eligible for the service.

The counseling service will be offered on Tuesdays and

Thursdays from 6 to 9 p.m., in order to reach those persons working during the day. Veterans will be counseled on an appointment basis only.

The purpose of the VA home counseling program is to advise the potential homebuyer of the technical and financial aspects of home buying.

The potential veteran homebuyers will be counseled concerning proper home selection (location, access to jobs, schools etc.), budgeting,

home care and buying within their means.

Cacti Need Winter Rest

EAST LANSING — If you associate a cactus only with a desert, then look again. Michigan State University horticulturist Dr. William H. Carlson says the cactus is a good house plant.

Cacti are sun-loving plants and must be treated accordingly. The amount of light they receive determines how much heat and moisture they can utilize or tolerate.

Light is poor during winter, so keep cacti cool to maintain the balance between heat and light. Water sparingly from November to March. A temperature of about 50 degrees is the best during that period. The small amount of water supply prevents their shriveling and saves their roots from drying. This winter rest period is required to make them flower in spring. Gardeners make the mistake of assuming that since cacti are desert plants, they want to be hot at all times, not realizing that winter nights can be bitterly cold on most deserts, Carlson said.

TRANSPLANT cacti in early spring (March or April) when the various types show signs of returning to activity, after their winter rest. Growing cacti that occupy their pots for the second year may be fed with a mild solution of a fertilizer once a month.

Offsets or shoots formed at the base or side branches of a cactus may be used as cuttings after their seasonal growth is completed. Sever with a sharp knife from the parent plant at their very bottom.

The cacti thrive in a sandy soil. They are quite susceptible to overwatering. Use small containers since the root systems are small compared to most foliage plants, Carlson recommends.

Set the cacti outdoors during the summer months. Plunge the pots in a bed of sand. Water more frequently during the hottest part of the summer.



The Green Thumb

By GEORGE ABRAHAM

Home Landscaping: Now's a good time to dream about landscaping your home next spring.

If you're operating on a tight budget, no reason why you can't landscape your grounds a little at a time. Planting shrubs in front of the home is probably the most important landscaping job you can do. This is called "foundation planting," a term although once descriptive, is no longer well suited to many new homes.

Foundation plantings were used to cover up the tall, unsightly foundations. Homes today seldom have the high foundation, so the planting might now more correctly be called a base planting.

Since the modern base planting is not really trying to hide anything, plants can be less dense and not as closely spaced as those used in the past.

Here are a few hints to consider when you set out shrubs. Select plants that when mature will be in scale with the house. For example, don't plant a Colorado blue spruce along the foundation, since this tree can grow 50 feet tall.

Don't overplant or underplant. Large homes may need many plants, but the small one needs only a few.

Keep the planting simple. Fancy plantings usually fail, and are more difficult to keep up. Always allow enough room for each plant so it can develop normally without heavy butchering (pruning).

Plant corners first, if the entire plantings cannot be made at once. Add plants as necessary to complete wall spaces. Make sure the plants you select will not cover windows or hide good architectural designs of the house.

You can save yourself a lot of headaches, if you sketch

your plan on a piece of paper first. Talk it over with your local nurseryman. He'll be glad to make suggestions even if he doesn't land the landscape job.

FREE: If you need help on home landscaping, send me a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of my booklet, "Landscaping Your Home." This guide was prepared by the Nurserymen's Association and makes a good addition to your green thumb library. Make sure your envelope is the large, business-size type.

GREEN THUMB CLINIC: "Please tell me how to care for a 'finger nail' plant. It has

a pretty bright red tip, just like a fingernail?"

Answer: You have what is known as a "painted fingernail" plant, a member of the Pineapple family. Leaves are green and strap-like. On the tip of the green leaves you see a bright rose-red tip, resembling a fingernail.

This item likes a semi-sunny to semi-shady room, with temperatures around 70 to 75 degrees. Prefers a loose, humusy soil, equal parts sand, peat and loam. Keep soil barely moist and replace water in the leaf axils at least once a week. A close member of this plant is the so-called "living vase," so called because the leaves will catch and hold water.

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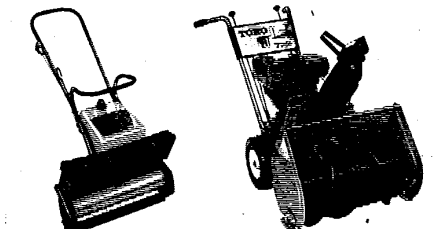
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