

## Dealing with Christmas Trees after Christmas

Since this is my first column of 2010 and the first one after Christmas I thought it would be appropriate to give you a few ideas of what to do with your Christmas tree after the holidays. There are plenty of uses for an old Christmas tree.

Here are a few:

Real Christmas Trees are biodegradable - the trunk and branches can be used as mulch for gardens, parks or in animal stalls. The mulch provides a protective barrier for the roots of other plants and vegetation while preventing weeds from growing. The mulch then decomposes, providing the nutrients plants need to thrive. Mulching programs are a fast-growing trend in communities throughout the nation. Convert the tree into wood chips. Use a chipper or mechanical tree grinder and use the chips as mulch around flowers and shrubs or along a path to prevent compaction.

Use your old tree as a shelter for animals (this is a good idea only if you live in a fairly wooded area). All you need to do is to put the tree out in your back yard. It takes several trees to make a good habitat, so ask your neighbors to donate their trees to your cause. Each year, you and your neighbors can rotate so that everyone gets a chance to build a habitat. Prop your tree up in the yard for the winter and hang treats for birds. Decorate it with seed and suet balls, orange slices, or pine cones coated with peanut butter and seed. The birds will come for the food and stay for the shelter in the branches. Before recycling, trees can be used to make bird feeders, adding color and excitement to the winter garden.

Strip the boughs from the trunk and use them as mulch around low-growing landscape plants. Cut up the trunk and use it for firewood or a "Yule log," next year, after the wood dries out. Important: Never burn your fresh Christmas Tree in a fireplace or wood stove. Burning the tree may contribute to creosote buildup. Sink your tree in your own pond, if you have one, or a local pond to help fish and other aquatic life. The tree serves as a little coral reef in that the branches provide substrate for water plants to grow and cover for minnows and other forms of small aquatic life. Larger fish are drawn by the shade and the presence of prey. How do you sink a tree? Tie the base to a cinder block with a short, stout rope and toss it in. Just be sure to get permission from the pond owner first! Some communities use Christmas Trees to make effective sand and soil erosion barriers, especially on beaches and along river beds. Sunk into private ponds, trees make an excellent refuge and feeding area for game fish.

Recycling has obvious benefits to the environment, whether it be Christmas Trees or newspapers. But being recycled is not the only environmentally-friendly advantage that Real Trees have over artificial ones. Breathe deeply at a Christmas Tree farm and you will enjoy not only the fresh pine fragrance, but also fresh oxygenated air. That's because of photosynthesis: the trees absorb carbon dioxide-laden air and emit oxygen. Just one acre of a Christmas Tree farm produces the daily oxygen requirement for 18 people. Young trees in their rapid growth years have a high rate of photosynthesis and thus produce more oxygen than older trees.

For each Christmas tree harvested, two to three new trees are planted in its place. In the United States, there are approximately one million acres in production for growing Christmas Trees. This translates to oxygen for 18 million people per day.

Although artificial tree owners will insist that theirs is a better choice because their tree is being used every year, the average life of an artificial tree is just six years. Then the plastic tree is tossed in a landfill where it will lie in a composed state for centuries.

### **2010 Future Harvest - CASA Annual Conference**

2010 Future Harvest - CASA Annual Conference will be held January 15 & 16, at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, WV. The Conference Schedule & Registration is now online at <http://www.futureharvestcasa.org/> Please Note: You must PRE-REGISTER for the conference this year due to NCTC being a federal facility. Commuter deadline is January 4. There will be NO at-the-door registration this year.

### **Pennsylvania Farm Show 2010**

The Pennsylvania Farm Show will run from January 9-16, 2010 at the Farm Show building in Harrisburg, PA. For more information on the Farm Show schedule go to their website at <http://www.farmshow.state.pa.us/>

### **Farming for the Future Conference**

The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) will hold their 2010 Farming for the Future Conference February 4 – 6, 2010 at the Penn Stater Conference Center in State College, PA. The 2010 Theme is The Sustainable Challenge: Providing for a Livable Tomorrow. For more information on the conference go to <http://www.pasafarming.org/conference2010>

### **2010 Ag Ed Dinner Meetings**

The 2010 Agricultural Education Dinner Meetings will be held January 14, February 11, and March 11 at 6:30 p.m. The January and March meetings will be at the Berkeley County Youth Fairgrounds. The February 11, 2010 meeting will be held at James Rumsey Technical Institute in Hedgesville. Dinner for all meetings will start at 6:30 with the educational program to follow. Please call 264-1936 to make a reservation for the meal one week prior to each date. There is no charge for the meal if we receive your reservation by noon the Wednesday a week before the meeting is to be held. Mark those dates on your calendar and plan on having a home cooked meal at the Berkeley County Youth Fair in January and March and at James Rumsey in February. Receive education on the following topics: Persistent BVD; Value Added; and Grazing. We have also applied for Pesticide Recertification Credits for the dinner meeting programs. I will have more information on our January meeting in a future column. See you at the dinner meetings.

### **Garden Tips**

- Increase humidity for houseplants
- Plan your 2010 garden layout
- Read seed catalogs
- Avoid using salt where runoff might injure plants
- Be on the lookout for the 2010 Garden Calendar which should be available shortly after the new year

### **Until next time ...Happy New Year, Gardening, and Farming!**

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