

## Living Christmas Tree Care: Black Hills Spruce

Displaying a living Christmas tree means making the most of the season with a tree that stays with you or a loved one after the holidays. Some Christmas celebrations are important enough to commemorate by planting the tree that was a part of a special Christmas.

### Here's how to do it:

1. Dig a hole BEFORE the ground freezes. Your planting hole should be about twice the width of the rootball of the tree. The rootball can be estimated by measuring the diameter of the pot. By making the planting hole twice the width of the rootball, you're providing the roots plenty of room to expand sideways, through freshly-laid, rich soil. Mix the soil you've dug out with compost, about half and half, and keep this mixture in your garage until ready to plant.

2. Gradually introduce your living tree from outside to inside over three or four days via the garage or enclosed porch. A tree that is dormant and exposed to immediate warmth will start to grow. You want to avoid any quick resumption of growth.

3. While the tree is introduced into the house via porch or garage, check for critters and insect egg masses as the tree acclimatizes.

4. Purchase a spray with an antidessicant or antiwilt product (Wilt Pruf) to minimize needle loss and apply during the introduction phase. This will not only reduce needle loss, it will contain the loss of valuable moisture lost to a climate controlled home.

5. If possible, locate your tree in the coolest part of the room and away from heating ducts. This will work with the antiwilt product to keep the tree moist and prevent the loss of valuable moisture.

6. Water your tree as often as is necessary to moisten the roots but not to cause sogginess.

7. Leave inside no longer than 7-10 days (some experts suggest only 4 days). Never add nutrients or fertilizers as that may initiate growth which you don't want to occur in a dormant tree.

8. Carefully introduce tree back outside using the reverse procedure.

9. When ready to plant, make sure the top of the rootball is not sitting below the soil line. After filling with your soil/compost mixture, tamp the soil and water it lightly to remove air pockets. After filling the hole, the rootball of the tree should protrude slightly above ground level, to promote good drainage. When the ground thaws in the spring, resume watering as you would with any newly planted tree or shrub.

Enjoy your beautiful new tree!

