

You May Enjoy Your Christmas Tree

Forests Not Hurt by Proper Cutting



THE use of Christmas trees, once decried by conservationists, is now approved by the U. S. Forest Service. A considerable part of the little trees that come to the market represent thinnings from public and privately owned forest lands. The normal course of events in a re-seeded forest area after lumbering or a fire brings about severe overcrowding and an intense competition among the young trees for a place in the sun. A great majority of the saplings are destined to lose out in the struggle, but if left to settle the contest among themselves the survivors are apt to be too slim and "weedy" to make good logs. Therefore thinning is resorted to, and the Christmas tree market provides a use for the trees that would otherwise have to be burned, and at the same time helps to defray the cost of cutting.

Another commercial source of Christmas trees that is growing in importance is the Christmas tree nursery, in which fine specimens of young spruces and firs are grown especially for the Christmas trade. Some of these trees are cut and sold in the usual way, and others are transplanted into tubs to serve as permanent Christmas trees. The purchasers move the tree out of the house after the holiday season and set the tub in a hole in the ground, where it serves as a part of the lawn shrubbery until another Christmas comes around. This eliminates the bother of shopping for a tree every year, and since the tree does not dry out in the house it does not litter the place up with dead needles as badly as ordinary Christmas trees usually do.

Many Kinds Offered

The most popular of Christmas trees, and the kind most abundantly supplied from thinnings in commercial forests, is the spruce. This is one of the most abundant of evergreens, found clear around the world wherever snows lie long in winter, and extending far southward along



mountain ranges. It is the commonest of the high-altitude conifers, for example, in the southern Appalachians. There are many species, but they are all recognizable by their four-sided, stiff, short, prickly leaves, and by their thin-scaled cones hanging downward on the twigs.

An even finer Christmas tree, though less abundant in this country, is the fir. The fir is the "Tannenbaum" of which the German children sing; it is the original Christmas tree, and was used at pagan Teutonic and Celtic midwinter festivals before the coming of Christianity to northern and western Europe. Its leaves are a little longer than those of the spruce, flatter in shape and usually curved, less stiff and quite without the prickliness of the spruce needles. Its cones are thin-scaled like those of the fir, but stand erect instead of hanging down. Most of the firs contain a good deal of gummy resin, which makes them rather sticky to handle and in some places has given the tree the name of "balsam."

In the Pacific Northwest, where the Douglas fir grows, little trees of this species are sometimes used at Christmas. It is not a fir in the strict sense; neither is it a spruce. It is intermediate between these two trees in the character of its foliage, but it can be distinguished easily by its cones. These hang downward, as do those of the spruce, but over each scale there projects a three-pronged appendage, which is lacking in both firs and spruces.

Pines are less used for Christmas



trees, except in the seaboard regions of the Southeast and to a certain extent in the Middle Atlantic States. Here the pine barrens and the neglected clay soils produce a scrubby growth of pines of little value as timber, and these supply a large quantity of satisfactory Christmas trees in the lower price brackets.

"Slow on the Greens"

Go slow on Christmas greens; there aren't any more where they came from. Almost all of the holly, ground pine, laurel and other Christmas greenery found in the market is gathered from the wild, and the demand is eating up the available stocks far more rapidly than natural growth is replacing them.

This is especially true in the case of holly and ground pine. Holly is a hard-wooded, slow-growing shrub or small tree that thrives in the South and along the eastern seaboard as far north as Massachusetts. One year's unrestricted cuttings destroys the growth of ten or a dozen years, and at this rate it will not be long until the native supply of holly will have vanished completely.

Americans are already importing European holly partly because of the increasing scarcity of our own species, though because it is a brighter and showier plant, with glossier leaves and more and larger berries. Here is a case where we need not be ashamed to admit the superiority of a foreign product, if it will result in the protection and preservation of a native wild plant.

Ground pine is the fine prickly green stuff that forms the basis of most Christmas garlands and wreaths. It is not a pine, but a relative of the ferns. Unlike holly, it has as yet never been successfully cultivated, although many attempts have been made. It is very widely distributed, but unfortunately it is even more slow about renewing its growth than holly, and once it is stripped from a given piece of ground it does not come back for many years if at all.

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