Q: I’m thinking about purchasing a cut tree for decorating this Christmas. Is there anything I should know?

A: When purchasing a cut tree, one should always look for a tree that has fresh green needles. Tamp the tree a few inches above the ground to see if the needles hold on. Only a few inner needles should fall off. You can also run your hand over some needles. They should be flexible with few falling off.

In addition to inspecting the tree for fresh needles, it’s prudent to monitor for insects. Movement of trees from one state to another provides possible entry of invasive insect species to our state. Look for anything unusual such as boring holes in the bark.

Once you get your tree home, you can place it in a tree stand after making a fresh cut at the base of the trunk. This will assure that water will be taken up to keep the tree fresh for weeks. You will need to replace the water frequently so that it never dries out. No additives are needed in the water. The tree can be placed in a pail of water for a few days in a shady spot outside if you’re not ready to bring it indoors.

Place the tree in a spot away from heat vents and sunny windows. Check that all of your electrical cords are in good condition. Always unplug your lights when leaving the home or going to bed.

Most of the tree lots are getting their trees from states such as North Carolina, Michigan and New York. There are Florida growers and you can find their location at the Florida Christmas Tree Association website http://www.flchristmastrees.com/Farms/Index.htm. Most of these will have a retail lot at their farm.

Additional note:
Phillippi Farmhouse Market is open for the winter, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

PLANTING GUIDE
Vegetables & herbs: Anise, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, chervil, collards, coriander, dill, eggplant, endive, fennel, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, onions, peas, parsley, pepper, radish, rutabaga, sage, spinach, squash, strawberries, Swiss chard, thyme, tomato and turnips.
Annuals: Begonia, Calendula, foxglove, geranium, Impatiens, Lobelia, ornamental cabbage and kale, petunia, Phlox, Salvia, strawflower, and Verbena.
Perennials: African iris, aster, blue daze, blue sage, Buddleia, bush daisy, candytuft, Dianthus, Gerbera daisy, Pentas, Salvia, Scabiosa, Shasta daisy, Verbena and Viola.
Blooming plants: Bauhinia vine, bottlebrush, Cape honeysuckle, Cassia, Chinese hat, Jatropha, lion’s ear, Mexican flame vine, Mexican sunflower, orchid tree, Philippine violet, red and yellow shrimp plants, silk floss tree, Thunbergia, and Tibouchina.
**Fruits in Season:** Avocado, banana, carambola, cherimoya, citrus (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, orange, tangelo and tangerine), hog plum, Indian jujube, kumquat, papaya, pecan, persimmon, pomegranate, and sea grape.

**Upcoming educational classes:**
Call 861-5000 or register on-line [http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu/](http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu/) for the following classes.

- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods-Creating your Florida Yard, North Port Library, 6:30 p.m. December 4
- Canning for the Holidays, Twin Lakes Park, 9:00 a.m. (3-hour class) December 5
- Plant Propagation, Englewood Community Garden, 1:00 p.m. December 12
- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods-Creating your Florida Yard, Gulf Gate Library, 1:30 p.m. December 14
- Rain Barrel Workshop, North Sarasota Library, 10:00 a.m. December 15
- Color in the Winter Landscape, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. December 19
- Irrigation, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. December 19
- Florida Snakes, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m. December 20

**GETTING HELP**
The Master Gardener Help Desk at Twin Lakes Park is available to answer your questions. Call 861-9807 or email at [mghelpdesk@scgov.net](mailto:mghelpdesk@scgov.net). Walk-ins are welcome Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m.-4 p.m., closed from noon-1 p.m. Satellite Help Desks are available weekly at library locations throughout Sarasota County.
(Patricia Porchey is an Urban Horticulture Agent with University of Florida/IFAS Sarasota County Extension. Website: [http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu](http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu))