

December is Christmas Tree Month

Putting up a Christmas Trees in your home is a great tradition not only in Michigan, but around the world. The scent of pine needles often brings up memories of winter holidays with family and friends. Recently, Governor Whitmer dedicated the month of December as Michigan's Christmas Tree Month, honoring it's place in the state's culture and economy. This long-standing ritual has it's roots deep in the history of immigrants coming to America and bringing their religious practices with them. Michigan is third in the nation in Christmas Tree production, which shows how popular this tradition still is in modern times. To get into the spirit of the season, we can dive into the history and significance of these trees.

It may come as a surprise that bringing evergreen trees indoors is older than Christmas itself. While the practice itself was popularized in America by German Lutheran immigrants in the 1800s, it has been around since ancient Egypt and Rome. Back then evergreen boughs were put up around the winter solstice, and seen as symbols of their gods of the sun and agriculture, and signified that winter would end soon. With this history in mind, the Puritans initially banned the apparently "pagan" ritual. As more immigrants came in and popularized the idea, it managed to withstand the test of time and become a standard practice for Christmas time. The lighting and adornment of Christmas trees comes from German culture too, although it is much different in America today than before. Apples, nuts, and candles were common back then, where today we have electric lights, baubles, and garland.

Getting a tree to decorate your home is not just a traditional experience for the family, but it is big business as well. There are hundreds of local tree farmers that help make the season so festive, from the huge tracts of forestland to small retail lots. In total, there are 560 Christmas Tree farms in the state, with a combined area of about 37,000 acres. In a statement from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, tree farmers in the state produce approximately 2 million trees per year, adding a net value of \$30-40 million to the economy. Getting the tree is often only part of the experience, many tree farms offer other family-friendly activities such as hay rides, visits with Santa Claus, and refreshments of hot apple cider.

Having a freshly cut tree in the home is not an experience that everyone will enjoy, and artificial trees are rising in popularity. However, there are many benefits to consider if you are thinking of making the switch either to or from getting a real tree. Pinenes, which are the aromatic chemicals in trees that make them "smell like Christmas", have numerous health benefits. Pinenes can provide stress relief through aromatherapy, since the chemicals cause a calming effect in the body. They have also been shown to have mild anti-inflammatory properties. For the ecologically minded, the use of real trees can be a net benefit for the environment. The varieties of trees often used for use in the home can grow on soil that crops would not survive on. Real trees also store carbon dioxide as carbon in their wood, and can be easily recycled as mulch.

If having a real Christmas tree is right for you, there is also the option of growing your own for the future. There are a wide variety of evergreen trees that grow native to Michigan, and your local Conservation District can help you choose one that best fits your land. Barry, Allegan, and Ottawa Conservation Districts have a forester on staff that can give you advice on what to plant. The Districts also have Tree Sales in the spring so you can get your seedlings locally. You can reach District Forester Ben Savoie at 269-908-4134, or by sending an email to ben.savoie@macd.org.



This Month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 6

Site Visit Acreage - 157

Private Sector Referrals - 5

Public Sector Referrals - 3

Media Occurrences - 6

Open Referrals

03-21-08

8 acres of woods that has red pine, oak mix. Wants to improve the wildlife benefits of the stand. Seeking timber buyer to remove pine and promote oak regrowth. Property is in Lee Township, Allegan County.

