

Christmas trees: More than decoration

(AP) — A harvest of 35 million Christmas trees each year isn't going to disturb the nation's ecology very much. However, it might upset you to watch trucks, railroad cars and sidewalk stalls stacked with the fragrant, symmetrical trees that will grace so many holiday homes.

Most of the trees come from Christmas tree plantations. Every tree cut professionally — or by cut-your-own visitors — will be replaced on a two-or-three-to-one basis during the spring tree-planting season.

The National Christmas Tree Growers Association says about 450,000 acres are devoted to tree production in the United States. About 15,000 individuals grow Christmas trees and no other crops.

Many tree plantations are on lands not well suited to other agricultural production. The industry generates about \$70 million annually at the retail

level and provides more than 100,000 part-time and about 7,500 year-around jobs.

Christmas tree plantations yield beautiful trees for the holidays and contribute to a better quality environment. The young trees convert carbon dioxide to pure oxygen as they grow.

A Purdue University Extension Service forester has estimated that an acre of growing Christmas trees produces daily oxygen requirements for 18 people.

The tree plantations also provide green belts pleasing to the eye and used as food and cover areas by wildlife.

Christmas tree growers strive, by means of new and improved techniques, to produce better quality trees.

They help nature by shearing the trees in early summer, controlling insect and disease depredations and checking complete vegetation.

These practices assure many high quality, attractive trees on retail lots shortly after Thanksgiving.

Early settlers often found the native Eastern red cedar was a suitable evergreen Christmas tree, although some objected to the fine, flexible, quick-drying needles.

The balsam fir has largely been replaced by the Scotch pine. In many areas, the Scotch pine is the most common Christmas tree. Because of its natural bushy shape, it is easy to prune. A 6- to 8-foot-tall tree takes 8 to 10 years to grow.

To identify the type of Christmas tree you are buying, look at the tree's needles. Generally, needles will be held on the branch either singly or in clusters. If you can pull off the twig needles that are held together in twos and fives, you are looking at a pine.

Several pines have bundles of two needles. The Scotch pine

has two-needle bundles with needles ranging from 1½ to 3 inches long, slightly twisted and fairly stiff. The Scotch pine retains needles well.

Red pine also has two needles. These are 4 to 6 inches long and are very flexible. Austrian pine, not often used as a Christmas tree, has two needles in a cluster, 4 to 6 inches long, very stiff and sharp.

If you can pull off clusters with five needles, the tree is likely a white pine. The needles of a white pine are thin and the branches are somewhat flexible. The white pine does not retain needles indoors as well as other pines, and is generally not sold as a Christmas tree.

Trees with single needles are more difficult to identify. If the needles pull off only as a single, you may be looking at a fir, spruce or hemlock.

If the individual needle is square or diamond-shaped

Hanukkah happenings light December days

by Marie L. McLeod

Although Hanukkah, the Jewish Feast of Lights, occurs in late November or December, it is not related to the Christian celebration of Christmas.

The Jewish community follows the lunar calendar, so Hanukkah occurs on a different day each year. This year it will begin Dec. 15 which, according

to the calendar, is at sundown on Dec. 14.

"Hanukkah is basically a family thing," said Barry Laves, a senior engineering technology major and president of the Hillel Foundation, a group of Jewish students at Texas A&M University.

He said since the end of the semester occurs the same time as Hanukkah begins, there will

not be many students left in the Bryan-College Station area to participate in the holiday. But for those who do, there will be services Dec. 15 at Rabbi Peter Tarlow's house.

It started in 165 B.C. when the Macabees conquered the Syrians in Israel, Laves said. The Jewish people reclaimed the Temple and spiritually cleansed it.

Laves said they always kept an "Eternal Light" burning in the Temple, which was fueled by one container of oil each day.

After reclaiming the Temple, miraculously, they found one uncontaminated oil container, which burned eight days straight, signifying the length of Hanukkah, he said.

The menorah, a candelabrum that holds nine candles and varies in shape from family to family, symbolizes the burning of the

container of oil, Laves said.

On the first night, the family lights the Shamus, the ninth candle, and also the first candle. The remaining nights are the same, with an additional candle being lit each night. The end of Hanukkah occurs when the eighth candle has been lit and burns down.

Scott Lewis, a senior psychology major from Houston, said the Jewish celebration is fun, not serious like Christmas.

In addition to lighting the candles, the family says special prayers, Lewis said. On the first night, along with lighting the candles, they say three prayers. For the remaining seven nights, they say two prayers.

Families usually get together on the holiday's first night for a big meal, which includes something fried in oil, relating the dinner to the container of oil, Lewis said.

