

# Introduction to Christmas Tree Farming



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# Introduction to Growing Christmas Trees

1. Why would you want to grow Christmas trees?
2. Marketing Considerations
  - Wholesale, Choose N' Cut, Retail Lots
3. Growing Considerations
  - Site Selection
  - Species
  - Planting
  - General Care
  - Pest Control



# Why grow Christmas Trees?

- Long term business venture
- Not a get rich quick scheme!
- Consider the pros and cons





## Pros

- Growing Christmas trees ties land up for less time than it does to produce other timber products
- Christmas trees can be grown on small acreages
- Less disturbance to groundcover
- Reduced machinery requirements

## Cons

- Must have capital reserves to cover production costs for several years
- Same risks associated with growing other crops (weather, insects, diseases)

# \$ Economics \$

- Revenue:
  - Economics on Christmas trees is a bit harder than with other commodities because we have less data.
  - Retail and Choose and Cut prices can range from \$53 - \$>100, but a lot of this pricing also depends on your area.
  - Wholesale prices (Fraser) between \$35 and \$50.
- Expenses:
  - Early costs: seedlings and planting
  - Maintenance: \$1-\$1.50/tree per year.
  - **Estimated** cost per tree: Wholesale, \$22 – Retail/C&C, \$30



# MARKETING

How you will market and who you will sell to should be your first consideration!

01

## WHOLESALE

Large amounts to one or a few buyers

02

## CHOOSE N' CUT

Selling an experience, not just the tree

03

## RETAIL

May be limited to location, access, or competition

# WHOLESALE CHRISTMAS TREES

Selling large amounts of  
trees at one time



Photo by Slaughters' Tree Farms

# Wholesale

- Selling large amounts to one or a few buyers
- Trees are pre-tagged in the field based on size and grade
- Trees must retain quality during storage and shipment
- Less \$ per tree
- Local and national competition
- In VA, wholesale growers are mainly in SWVA
- Phytosanitary certificates/others for shipping





**Let's visit a wholesale operation!**

# CHOOSE AND CUT CHRISTMAS TREES

Customers walk through the farm, select their tree, and may or may not cut the tree down themselves.



# Choose and Cut

- Higher prices than a wholesale tree
- Can also sell other Christmas items
  - Wreaths, roping, etc.
- You will be managing fields with different species and ages
- Short sales season! (Thanksgiving – Christmas)
- **You are selling an *experience*, not just the tree!**



**Let's visit a choose and cut operation!**

# RETAIL LOTS

Retail lots consist of a temporary setup to sell pre-cut trees.



Photo by Steve Morgan, licensed under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) license

# RETAIL LOTS

- With retail lots, may be limited by location, access, or competition
- Can demand a high price for trees
- You will lose any trees that aren't sold!

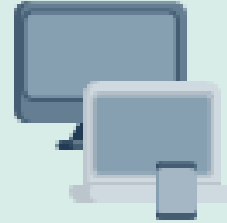


# SOCIAL MEDIA/ONLINE MARKETING



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is people's go-to when finding information today. Be current – be visible – incorporate videos!



## UP-TO-DATE WEBSITE

You need a website – not just a Facebook! A website belongs to **you** and can make you easier to find on Google!





# CHRISTMAS TREE PRODUCTION

Photo by Slaughters' Tree Farms



# 01

## Site Selection and Preparation

Selecting good sites gives you a critical head start with the gambles of farming!

- Suitable amount of land
- Appropriate soil type
  - Elevation
  - Microclimates
- Water and Air Drainage
- Roads and access for harvesting

1. Early and proper planning is imperative!
2. Consult your local VCE agent, read the production guides listed at the end of this presentation, join your local Christmas tree growers association, and start attending relevant meetings and workshops.
3. Early mistakes in species selection, road layout, spacing, etc. can take years to overcome!

# Site Preparation

1. May include:
  - Removing existing trees and/or stumps/other obstacles
  - Controlling grasses and weeds
2. You should prep your site the fall before planting.
3. Soil testing can be done with the help of your local Extension office.

# 02

## Species Selection

Species should be largely determined by geographic region and climate. Also consider popularity and supply.

Select the right size, age, and quality planting stock.



Fraser Fir



White Pine

# Commonly Grown VA Christmas Tree Species

## Traditional VA Species

- **Fraser fir**
- **Eastern white pine**
- **Scotch pine**
- **Norway spruce**
- **Colorado blue spruce**
- **Leyland cypress**
- **Douglass fir**

## New exotic species

- **Concolor fir**
- **Canaan fir**
- **Turkish fir**
- **Carolina sapphire express**
- **Serbian spruce**

# Commonly Grown VA Christmas Tree Species

**Table 1. Species suitable and most commonly used for Christmas tree plantations in Virginia.\***

Coastal Plain	Piedmont	Mountains
White pine	White pine	White pine
Scotch pine	Scotch pine	Scotch pine
Virginia pine	Virginia pine	Virginia pine
Norway spruce		Norway spruce
		Fraser fir

*\*White pine, Scotch pine, Virginia pine, and Norway spruce are available through the Virginia Department of Forestry.*

# 03

## Planting

Start small! Build markets up gradually.

Plan for access for harvesting and accessibility of roads.  
(General rule – no place in plantation should be more than 100 ft from a road!)

Plant soon as possible in the spring to allow roots to develop.

Table 1. Total trees per acre with varying spacing between and within rows.

Feet between rows	Feet within rows						
	4.5	5.0	5.5	6.0	6.5	7.0	7.5
4.5	2,151	1,936	1,760	1,613	1,489	1,383	1,291
5.0	1,936	1,742	1,584	1,452	1,340	1,244	1,162
5.5	1,760	1,584	1,440	1,320	1,218	1,131	1,056
6.0	1,613	1,452	1,320	1,210	1,116	1,037	968
6.5	1,489	1,340	1,218	1,116	1,031	957	894
7.0	1,382	1,244	1,131	1,037	957	888	830
7.5	1,291	1,162	1,056	968	894	830	774





Photo by Kyle Peer, Extension Specialist, Reynolds Homestead

# 04

## General Care

- Weed Control
- Shearing
- Fertilization
- Pest Control
- Coloring



### Horticultural and Forest Crops

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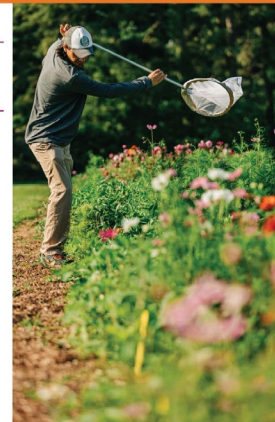
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#### PEST MANAGEMENT GUIDE

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# Resources and Credits



An Introduction to Growing  
Christmas Trees in Virginia – Kyle  
Peer, Virginia Tech



NC State Extension  
Christmas Trees  
[christmastrees.ces.ncsu.edu](http://christmastrees.ces.ncsu.edu)



Establishing a Christmas Tree  
Plantation – NC State Extension



Characteristics of Some Evergreen  
Trees – NC State Extension



Species for Christmas Tree Planting  
in Virginia – James E. Johnson,  
Virginia Tech



Christmas Tree Marketing –  
University of Maine  
Bulletin 7009



Slaughter's Tree Farms  
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