Caring for your tree for the holidays and beyond

If you live in an area where the ground freezes, try to dig a hole before that happens. Don't forget to flag the hole so no one falls in it! The hole should be twice as wide as the root ball.

Gradually acclimate your Christmas tree to indoor temperatures by placing it in an unheated garage or on an enclosed patio or porch. Make sure to keep the root ball hydrated, even outside.

Your tree’s worst enemy is lack of moisture, so make sure it is watered regularly and kept away from heat sources like heating vents. The tree should be kept inside a maximum of two weeks. Too much time indoors can cause the tree to convert to its springtime physiology. Once that happens, a tree loses its resistance to freezing temps.

When the holidays are over, your tree, which is now used to indoor temperatures, needs to be re-acclimated to outdoor temperatures. Place it on an enclosed porch or in an unheated garage and make sure to keep the root ball moist.

Cut the wire/rope and burlap away from the root ball. Install the tree so that the root flare is not buried. The top of the root ball should be even with the ground surface. Plant Health Care's top-selling product, PHC® Tree Saver®, gives trees the healthy start they need. This product, which should be mixed into the backfill, contains mycorrhizal fungi to increase root mass and absorption, beneficial bacteria to stimulate root growth and soil fertility and hydrogels to hold more ground water.

Water the root ball of your new transplant thoroughly. If the soil sinks too much, you may need to add more soil to establish a level surface.

Larger, top-heavy trees like evergreens will need to be staked to prevent them from falling over. Use rings and passive attachments that do not wound the tree, because wounds provide entry sites for diseases and pests. Be sure to remove all staking material in the spring after roots have become established. Otherwise, the tree will not develop properly, and the securing straps or rings may eventually strangle the trunk.

Mulch helps conserve moisture, and furnishes organic matter for gradual decomposition and mineral release. Mulches help keep the soil well aerated by reducing soil compaction that results when raindrops or feet hit the soil. Mulch also reduces water runoff and soil erosion and helps stimulate growth of beneficial microbes. For individual trees, the mulched area should extend at least 2 feet beyond the edge of the root ball. It is advisable to pull the mulch at least 2 inches away from the base of plants to prevent bark decay. Never bury the root flare in the mulch. A maximum mulch depth of 2-4 inches is recommended. Use 2-3 inches for clay to loamy soils, and 3-4 inches for sandier soils.