

Horticulture Column Submission
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Hello and happy New Year! To all the best wishes for a good beginning to a better year than before. My name is Phoebe Eichhorst and I am serving as Buffalo County Extension's newest Horticulture Aide. I started just shy of a month ago and am looking forward to writing to -- and hearing from -- all of you. As per the usual traditions of creating New Year's Resolutions, in 2021 I hope to finish up the projects that I've put off for months, especially sewing a rug and fixing a credenza. What do you hope to accomplish this year?

For my first article, I would like to touch on a seasonal topic. As the New Year approaches, it's time to consider what will become of the beautiful, but dying, Christmas tree in your living room. The presents have been unwrapped and there's no more water in the tree stand, so what to do? Maybe tidying up is one of your resolutions? If so, I have some ideas for what you can do with your tree!

As always, make sure you remove all of your decorations from the tree. You don't want to be wondering where that string of lights or your favorite ornaments went the next time you're ready to beautify the house for the holiday season.

The first option is to recycle your tree. There are various drop off sites around Kearney that you can take advantage of through January 15 -- Apollo Park, Centennial Park, Harvey Park, and Nina Hammer Park. It's definitely one of the easiest things to do with your old tree. Typically, trees dropped off go through a chipper and become mulch, which is great for gardens come spring and summer. That mulch might end up in the parks you take a walk through this summer. Alternatively, you could chop up your tree for firewood. Because the trees have a fair amount of sap in them, be careful and consider using it for your outdoor fire pit rather than in the house. It is also best to leave the tree outside to dry out for a few months since it still contains water and sap.

Another option for those that have a large property is to take the tree out to become a new habitat for wildlife. Birds will find a way to make a nest in the branches, especially if you add some fruit or bird feeders to it. If you have a body of water on your property, consider dropping the tree into a pond or lake, and the tree can become a habitat for fish. What a wonderful gift for the animals!

Now for those ambitious DIY folks, I'd like to offer a few fun ideas. If the needles on the tree are still green, you can take them off to use as fresheners around the house. Put the needles in a paper bag and the fresh smell will surround your room, making it feel as though the whole tree is still there! The needles can also be made into winter wreaths and used in window boxes. Cut the branches as you see fit and be creative. Add some ribbon for color. For Christmas trees that have smaller trucks, chop them up for wooden coasters. Again, make sure you let the tree dry out! After you've cut them to your preferred size, draw on a fun pattern or saying and then varnish the coasters.

Overall, there are plenty of options to consider when you look at your tree and think "it's time to go." As we hop into 2021, I wish you all a great start to the year. If you have any questions or suggestions on topics, please feel free to reach out to me at the Buffalo County Extension Office by phone at 308.236.1235 or email at phoebe.eichhorst@unl.edu.