



Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore/Clay Counties

December 4, 2019

Holiday Greenery and Trees

Deciding on an artificial versus real Christmas tree is a matter of personal preference. Growing up, we had an artificial tree mostly because my mom's allergies were very sensitive to the smell of pines and our house was pretty small so having a small tree we knew would fit in our dining room was preferred. We did however one year have a pine tree that we cut out of our windbreak that needed to come down and I remember how big, beautiful and magical it was! There are pros to cons for both. If you decide to go real, here are some tips to help you.

Popular Christmas tree species include Frasier Fire, Balsam Fire, Douglas Fir, Scotch Pine, Black Hills Spruce (White Spruce variant) and Eastern White Pine. Firs have a strong and pleasant smell most people enjoy while spruces have a strong odor but many folks do not find it as pleasant. Also look at the needle sizes and branch strength depending on what type of ornaments you will place on the tree. Firs usually have short needles and strong branches, while pines often bend with the weight of heavy ornaments.

Once you make your tree selection, clean it thoroughly from needles lodged among the branches. Make a fresh straight cut across the trunk about an inch from the original cut which will open the stem for water intake. The Nebraska Christmas Tree Growers Association also recommends to keep the water level above the fresh cut; if the water level drops below the fresh cut a seal will form as it does on fresh flowers and a new cut will be necessary. When purchasing a tree, you can drive to a "Choose and Cut" Tree Farm and pick out your own tree, or many retailers also sell them. Just be sure and find one that is fresh. To locate a "Choose and Cut" tree farm, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's website has a list of locations to choose.

If you don't want a real tree, you can also make or purchase your own greenery from your own landscape. Nicole Stoner, extension horticulturalist wrote a blog on "Holiday Plants" and provided suggestions for using greenery to bring a nice holiday scent inside the home. White pine, juniper, spruce, ivy and holly are all great choices of live greenery for your home this holiday season. You can take these directly from your landscape, just be careful when you prune these decorations off of your living plants. Don't make all of cuts in the same location and try to make them far enough back in the plant that the other branches cover the cuts. Use a hand pruner to make good cuts that will not harm your tree or shrub. These can then be used in swags or wreaths. Several years ago, I even participated in a workshop that took real branches to make outdoor arrangements in pots when watered well.

Farm Bill Programs

Nebraska Extension and USDA Farm Service Agency in Nebraska will host a series of Farm Bill education meetings over the next two months to assist producers as they begin to make farm-bill related program decisions. The 2018 Farm Bill, signed into law last December, reauthorized the existing Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) safety



net programs that were in the 2014 Farm Bill, however producers will need to make new program enrollment decisions over the coming months. While the ARC and PLC programs under the new farm bill remain very similar to the previous farm bill, a few program changes coupled with changes in market conditions and outlook could significantly impact producer decisions.

The joint Nebraska Extension and Nebraska Farm Service Agency producer education meetings are scheduled at numerous locations across the state from late November to mid-December in advance of the coming ARC/PLC enrollment deadlines in early 2020. The meetings are all free and open to the public. Advance registration is encouraged for planning purposes for materials and facilities. Attendees can register for any of the meetings conveniently on the web at farmbill.unl.edu or by calling or visiting their county FSA or Extension office. The educational programs are each set to run three hours in length, featuring information and insight from FSA specialists and Extension experts, as well as other relevant information from local agencies.

The meetings are available statewide with several locations in each region of the state. The schedule for programming closest to us is as follows:

- Bruning - Bruning Opera House - **December 5**, 1:30-4:30 PM
- York - York County Fairgrounds Cornerstone Building - **December 6**, 9 AM-12 NOON
- Beatrice - Gage County Fairgrounds 4-H Building – **December 17**, 9 AM-12 NOON
- Geneva – Fillmore County Fairgrounds Ag Hall – **December 18**, 9 AM-12 NOON

There also are resources available online that can educate producers in their ARC/PLC decision-making process. Links to these resources are available from FSA at www.fsa.usda.gov/ne under the Spotlights section or from Extension at farmbill.unl.edu.