

It All Adds Up: Steps You Can Take to Control Moisture Loss in Your Trees

A freshly cut Christmas tree can lose over half the water it contains in one day of neglect. That's one day exposed to sun and wind. In a few days of dry conditions, a tree can easily go from being fresh to...FRIED! Living trees are perishable. Dry trees lose color, branches stiffen, needles shed, and foliage can sun-scald. Any loss of moisture without the means of replenishing water degrades tree freshness. With average care, any single day might not be stressful enough to fully sap freshness, but water losses are cumulative. At some point, your trees will lose the ability to easily take up water and your customer's experience with the product will be compromised.

The principles of keeping trees fresh are straight-forward – keep trees cool, shaded and moist. Making that happen on retail lots can be difficult. But if chain store lots that handle 8,000 trees can put good tree care practices into place, independent retailers should be able to meet or exceed the care provided by mass merchants.

Any practice that protects trees from drying can make a difference. Shade can be provided by a tent, trees, or from the north side of a building. Water can be provided using saturated mulch, a shallow pool, a tree stand, or hand watering. Wind can be blocked by a fence, shade cloth, tent walls, or a stand of trees. Remember, the trees at the edge of a pile will suffer greater exposure and greater moisture losses than the average tree in the middle.

The freshness of your products depends on the care you provide. You make the choice to add, maintain, or subtract water from the trees on your lot. You either make it a priority with your staff or not. Your competition can also choose to make it a priority. You may use tree quality as a way to distinguish yourself from the competition, but keep in mind that freshness cuts across all grades of tree. Consumers will have a better experience with a fresh #2 tree than with a dry premium. Savvy consumers will look for fresh trees and the signs that you are taking steps to keep your trees fresh.

Consider your retail lot in light of good and bad examples listed in the table below. Moisture loss percentages are theoretical and could be much greater for any single stage or practice.

Examples of Cumulative Moisture in Christmas Trees on a Retail lot

Stage in Care	Good Practice	% Moisture Loss	% Moisture Left	Bad Practice	% Moisture Loss	% Moisture Left
Tree shipped to Florida	Refrigerated trailer used; night-time travel	-5%	95%	Flatbed trailer used; daytime travel	-10%	90%
Truck is unloaded at retail lot	Trees unloaded within two hours	-5%	90%	Trees unloaded 8 hours later	-10%	80%
Trees stored temporarily for 24 hours in overly-full lot	North side of a building in partial shade	-2%	88%	Lying in a pile on pavement in full sun	-10%	70%
Trees moved to normal storage area	Standing upright under natural shade or tent with sides	-2%	86%	Lying in a pile in a lath house or a tent with no sides	-5%	65%

Examples of Cumulative Moisture in Christmas Trees on a Retail lot Continued

Stage in Care	Good Practice	% Moisture Loss	% Moisture Left	Bad Practice	% Moisture Loss	% Moisture Left
Trees displayed	In natural shade, a tent, or north side of a building	-2%	84%	In full sun, a tent without sides, or southern exposure	-10%	55%
Displayed trees are watered	Displayed in a water stand with evening misting of site	+10%	94%	Displayed without a water stand or irrigation	-10%	45%
Consumer buys tree & drives it home on top of car	Fresh cut made on trunk and care instructions given	-2%	92%	No fresh cut and no care instructions given	-5%	40%
Consumer displays tree in water	Tree fresh enough to rehydrate	+5%	97%	Tree dry, trunk is sealed, and will not rehydrate	-10%	30%
Cumulative moisture loss	Tree holds up past New Year's Day, an object of pride	Total Loss 3%	Total Left 97%	Tree taken down early and replaced with a fake tree	Total Loss 70%	Total Left 30%