

What To Do With the Christmas Tree

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If your Christmas tree came down from the attic in a box, then once Christmas is over it goes back into the same box and back up to the attic. But if your Christmas tree has been getting watered every day for most of the month of December, then you have a bit of a different issue of what to do with your Christmas tree once Christmas is over.

Far too many people just put their tree out on the curb and wait for the sanitation crews to come and pick them up. This is an unfortunate waste of a resource and just adds to the already overcrowded situation that we face across the country at landfills. While it is convenient, we need to find better things to do with our used Christmas trees!

Historically, groups have collected old Christmas trees, after they've been fully undecorated, to use for wildlife habitat. Sometimes these are placed in big piles on public lands as giant brush piles. Other times they've been tied together and hooked to an "anchor" of some form and drug out onto the ice where they'll sink when the ice melts and provide fish habitat. Again this year the Geary County Fish and Game will be collecting Christmas trees for wildlife habitat. The collection point will be the lot at 14th and Jackson, where it has been for the past several years. Remember though, it is imperative that you remove ALL decorations prior to taking these to a collection point and please, Christmas trees ONLY, no yard trash!

If you happen to have a chipper/shredder, or know someone that does, you can quickly convert your tree into mulch, very fragrant mulch at that! The mulch is great for adding to a landscape bed or perennial bed. You can also add it as extra protection at the base of roses or other somewhat tender perennials. This appears to be shaping up to be a year where we could use some extra mulch and protection on tender plants!

If you don't have a chipper/shredder you can still make use of most of the tree in the landscape. Most evergreen branches are quite flat so they can be cut off and placed over and around those same tender plants to provide extra mulch and protection.

If you have a wood stove or an outdoor fireplace, the branches can be cut up, allowed to dry down further and used for kindling. The main trunk can be cut into appropriate lengths and also split for kindling or left intact to burn in the stove or fireplace. Because of the high resin content of evergreens, they tend to snap and pop a lot when burned so they are not safe to be used in open fireplaces indoors. But for the other uses I mentioned, they catch fire quickly and burn hot, so truly some good kindling!

By far, my favorite use of an old Christmas tree, and what we do every year, is to use it for cover and shelter near the bird feeders. Some people will tie their old tree up to an existing landscape tree, but I just lay it down on the ground near my feeders and the birds use it all winter long. It can provide protection from the wind and snow and can also provide a place to escape when that hawk visits the backyard. I've known some homeowners that cut the branches off, drill 3/4 to 1 inch holes about one half inch deep in the trunk, pack suet in them and then tie the tree up to a support and let the woodpeckers work on the suet!

A Christmas tree doesn't have to be a one month and done sort of thing. It can continue to bring pleasure and enjoyment in so many different ways through the months ahead. You paid good money for that tree. Find other ways to reuse it, don't just trash it!