

Needle Drop (Importance of a Fresh Cut)

Needle drop on cut trees is from dehydration. All cut trees water uptake slows with time. This is because the wound-healing process (sap flowing to the wound and setting) blocks pores from accepting water. Some species (like Norway spruce) are more "sappy" than other species. In nature, this wound-healing process is good and helps trees with ordinary wounds. The trees' wound healing process makes no distinction between ordinary wounds and fatal wounds (trunk completely severed).

Sap flows to the wound, air contacts the sap, and the sap hardens and sets to seal the wound. Whether you purchase a pre-cut tree from a lot, or fresh harvest from a farm, yet another fresh cut should be¹ made to remove the air-dried sap just before placing in the water stand. The amount of trunk you remove is a judgement call depending on how much time has elapsed from the field cut. A small additional kiss cut can be adequate for a tree that was cut just in the prior few hours, but for a tree that was cut days prior, you probably should remove at least a 1/4 inch. Fresh harvested trees begin the healing process much faster than some people realize, so please don't skip doing another fresh cut just before placing the tree in the water stand. **Try and keep the air-drying time at the cut to a practical minimum.**

Obviously, if the water level in the stand is ever allowed to go below the cut, air will make contact with the sap and dry and set much more quickly. Also, if the tree is near a heat source, it will dry out much more quickly. If possible, nearby heat vents should be closed to reduce the flow of hot air on the tree.

Norway spruce is an excellent tree. It was the no. 1 selling tree in Europe years ago and has been a popular fresh harvest cut tree in the US for many years. However, because it is a "sappy" fast healer, it is not a good choice on pre-cut lots. The water uptake and needle retention will be inferior compared to most other species. A fresh cut is important on all trees but even more important with Norway spruce. The Norway spruce remains a good and popular fresh harvest Christmas tree but because of their fast healing they do dry faster than other species. Their time indoors (warm and dry) is more limited. It is better to not harvest too early.

The NCTA, National Christmas Tree Association, has emphasized the importance of fresh cuts for many years based on their testing. Their testing also saw no benefit to the additives that they tested. The NCTA feels that plain tap water is fine.

Please don't skip doing a fresh cut on your tree just before placing it in the water stand. A fresh cut will allow your tree to drink better. Please don't allow the water level to drop below the cut because air contact will allow the sap to dry and set more quickly. Please limit the tree's direct exposure to the drying effects of heat sources. Please don't harvest too early and excessively expose the tree to warm, dry conditions.