

Modern Christmas tree farms offer eco-friendly services

As consumers became aware of environmental issues, demand for farm-grown Christmas trees declined.

“Consumers may think they are saving a tree or saving the Earth by not purchasing a real Christmas tree,” said Marsha Gray, executive director of the Michigan Christmas Tree Association, an organization that promotes the use of farm-grown Christmas trees. “However, what they fail to understand is that real trees are a farm-grown product, produced specifically for harvest as a Christmas tree.”

Tree growers replant two to three seedlings for every tree harvested. While the tree grows, it provides oxygen and a wildlife refuge. Also, real trees biodegrade quickly and can be composted for further use, while artificial trees take many years to break down. Gray says sales generally peak the first weekend of December, but “(we) see a trend of consumers putting up their Christmas trees earlier and earlier.”

TROY

Telly’s Greenhouse, in Troy and Shelby Township, has been selling pre-cut Christmas trees for more than 30 years. “With our broad selection of varieties, sizes and prices, we can usually find the perfect tree for anyone,” said owner George Papadelis. “Fraser firs are the most popular trees. They have perfect trunks, excellent needle retention, a wonderful smell, and ... have a more natural shape than most pine and spruce.”

All of Telly’s trees are imported from farms in Michigan, North Carolina, and the West Coast. Telly’s also provides additional services such as shaking, baling, and tying the tree to vehicles. Like the tree farms, Telly’s also sells easy-to-use tree stands. “The trees we have available today are gorgeous. And having the right tree stand goes a long way, too,” Papadelis said. Although artificial Christmas trees provide a level of convenience and less maintenance, Papadelis favors a real tree. “In a society that is often fast-paced and technology-driven, I believe a real Christmas tree is one of many ways we can remind ourselves of our childhood and family tradition,” he says. Both Telly’s Greenhouse locations are open seven days a week. Popular choices of Christmas trees include the Fraser fir, Douglas fir, white pine and blue spruce.

OXFORD

The Candy Cane Christmas Tree Farm in Oxford advertises itself as the “Home of the Living Christmas Tree.”

Operated by organic gardeners Frank and Cathy Genovese, the farm boasts a number of innovations, including a drip irrigation system and natural inter-cropping methods. Thirty-six miles of water lines cross the farm, providing irrigation to a variety of exotic evergreens that normally would not grow in Michigan.

“It’s just like a lawn, except on a massive, huge scale,” said Frank Genovese. Established in 1977, he perfected his business by utilizing Earth-friendly principles to create a self-sustaining tree farm. In 2003, Genovese successfully incorporated his techniques to offer Michigan’s only “living Christmas tree” in response to customers who don’t feel comfortable cutting a tree. Utilizing a pot-in-pot system, the living Christmas tree is grown in a light-weight medium consisting of composted evergreens that allows it to retain its entire root system.

The tree is easy to manage and can survive indoors for up to 10 days, then can be replanted. The Candy Cane Christmas Tree Farm is certified by the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program, and is recipient of the Michigan Farm Bureau’s 2007 Award for Proactive Leadership in Ecology Management.

“You’re seeing something ... unique on this farm,” Genovese said. “The trees help each other because they are diverse.”

In addition to the trees, which include Korean fir and Serbian spruce, the Candy Cane farm provides a wholesome Christmas adventure for the family. Several ponds dot the landscape and rescued farm animals relax in pens. Christmas music plays throughout the area.

“What I sell that is more important than the product is the family experience,” he said.

OAKLAND TWP.

The Addison-Oaks Christmas Tree Farm in Oakland Township is operated, interestingly enough, by another couple named Frank and Cathy.

Grown on a rolling 20-acre farm, the trees offered by owner Frank Rimi, wife Cathy and their three sons, are meticulously hand-trimmed to shape and density that is perfect for decorating.

“Our trees are all organically grown using eco-friendly farming methods, which means that we don’t use any chemical coloring ... we don’t use any pesticides that can leach into the soil or contaminate nearby streams and ponds,” Frank Rimi says.

With the exception of the occasional chainsaw and tractor, the farm uses hand and electrical tools to minimize fossil fuel emissions, which are harmful to the environment.

“Customers are always thrilled to see their tree being mechanically cleaned and wrapped, using clean, quiet electric machinery, without the smell, smoke and noise of internal combustion engines.”

The Addison-Oaks farm offers 10 varieties of trees ranging from 5 to 17 feet tall. Customers have testified that the farm’s trees are fuller, taller and better shaped than other farms in southeast Michigan.

“What people think they like when they come in, sometimes they’re surprised at how many other beautiful varieties there are that they end up choosing a different one,” Rimi said.

Like the Candy Cane farm, Addison-Oaks tree farm offers a wide assortment of fragrant wreaths and garland made fresh daily. Frank Rimi began his business in 1988 but a drought killed his first year’s crops. That did not discourage him.

“The following year I replanted again and that time most of them took, and I’ve been replanting every year since.” The farm is between Bald Mountain State Recreational Park and the Addison-Oaks County Park and provides a haven for local wildlife such as deer and wild turkeys.

Both the Candy Cane and Addison-Oaks Christmas tree farms also donate their services to numerous charitable organizations and programs such as the March of Dimes and Trees for Troops.

“We do what we can to help the community,” Rimi said.

Both farms also provide additional services such as pruning, drilling and baling. They are open to the public seven days a week through Dec. 23, including Thanksgiving Day. Both farms are recognized by the National and Michigan Christmas Tree Associations.