

# Home and Leisure

## December can be a deadly month

More residential fires and fatalities occur in December than in any other month. Trees, woodstoves, fireplaces and busy kitchens all contribute to this unfortunate statistic, and all deserve extra care and caution. But sometimes even good intentions are not enough when it comes to holiday safety.

Iris Boyko, claims adjuster for Wellington Insurance in Halton-Peel, relates two incidents where clients took basic safety precautions, yet still experienced problems.

One client plugged in a string of bulbs and laid them out on the carpet to inspect them before putting them on the tree. "Good thing she did too, because the wiring had deteriorated and burned her carpet - much less serious than the damage that would have resulted had the lights been on the tree," Boyko advises.

"Inspect bulbs on a concrete floor to avoid the danger of scorching or fire," advises Boyko. "The basement or your garage are good alternatives, but make sure the floors are dry - or you could be in for a shock."

Check light sets for cracked bulbs and frayed, broken or exposed wires. Never use indoor

lights outdoors or outdoor lights indoors and always use lights that are approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). It's also advisable not to overload electrical circuits or run electric cords under rugs.

A cheerful blaze in the fireplace is always welcome over the holidays, but Boyko stresses the importance of ensuring the fire is completely dead before disposing of the ashes. She recalls another Wellington client who waited overnight before cleaning out the ashes from the fireplace. "Unfortunately it wasn't long enough," says Boyko. "There were still some live embers in the ashes which started a fire in the garage where the garbage was stored. Use a metal container for fireplace ashes, Boyko advises, and store them outside, not in the basement or garage."

To avoid other fire hazards, trees should be kept in water and positioned away from heat vents to prevent drying out. Always shut off bulbs before going out or going to bed, and never use electric lights on metallic trees.

This month, Canadian Consumer - The Radio Edition, sponsored by Wellington Insurance,

focuses on holiday safety tips from the Canada Safety Council. The Safety Council recommends keeping an all-purpose dry chemical fire extinguisher handy. This is true at all times of the year, but if you don't have one, now is a good time to get one - for yourself and as a gift for someone you care about.

More information on holiday safety and fire prevention is available from Wellington Insurance brokers.

### Holiday Safety Check List

- Inspect electrical light sets for worn or frayed cords and damaged or burned-out lights
- Never use outdoor lights indoors or indoor lights outdoors
- Don't overload electrical circuits with too many plugs in one outlet
- Keep Christmas trees in water to prevent drying out
- Do not block exits with trees or decorations
- Shut off all seasonal lights before retiring for the night
- Be sure fireplace ashes are extinguished before disposing of them
- Dispose of ashes and ashtrays outdoors in a metal container
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy

## Christmas collectibles make fine gifts

The Christmas gift-buying season finds us all scrambling to find the perfect gift for everyone on our list.

How do you find the right gift for family, friends and business associates? What do you buy for that person who has everything? How do you find something that will be appreciated and that will last past Christmas? How do you avoid the impersonal gift of money or gift certificate in a card? How do you avoid the disappointment of picking something that's the wrong size or color? These are all the challenging questions for us all.

### COLLECTIBLES MAY BE THE ANSWER YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

Most people collect something, and the range of collectibles is as diverse as people are. Some people collect music boxes, souvenir spoons from faraway places, menus from famous restaurants, thimbles, commemorative plates, comic books, figurines of their favorite animals, brass ornaments - the list is endless. If your gift adds to their collection, it's sure to be appreciated.

If someone isn't yet a collector but does have some special interests, your gift can get them started on a collection. Then your choice each year after that is easy - just add to their collection! For example, equestrian enthusiasts may like horse ornaments in fine china. Art and history buffs would love the commemorative coins on historical themes issued each year by the Royal Canadian Mint.

Coins are also a good choice if you're looking for a keepsake that holds its value. Many youngsters have started coin collections and savings accounts on the basis of coins they received for Christmas or birthdays.

Often, you may have to send presents to people in other parts of the country or even overseas. A

souvenir of your town may be just the thing. For example, a town plate or souvenir spoon that bears the name of your town would be welcomed by the person who collects those items. Souvenirs of Canada, like the picture book of scenic views or a special proof set of Canadian coins, are great for family or friends in other countries.

Remember that if you're sending presents by mail, it's best to select something small and non-breakable. If the item is fragile, pack it carefully in a sturdy box and surround it with popped popcorn which will cushion it from the shocks of shipping and handling. It's a good idea to insure a gift sent by mail, and insurance is available from the post office.

Look at all the names on your list. Take the time to find out what collectible items would appeal to each of them, and give it a try. If it's a hit, your shopping decisions next year could be very easy.

There's something in human nature that makes us all collectors at heart. When you add to someone's collection, your interest and friendship is remembered long after the gift is given.

## Town Gardener

### What constitutes a fresh tree

By TOM CAVAN  
Christmas Trees

Christmas is a special time of year for all people. Historians trace countless sources that have led to present day custom of setting up a tree and decorating it. The most directly related story occurred in Virginia in 1842. A man named Charles Ninnegerod introduced the custom and the tree was described as being "splendidly decorated with strings of popcorn, gilded nuts and lighted candles." Obviously, Charles didn't listen to the fire marshal. I am not recommending you use lighted candles but I would like to recommend the following tips on how to pick the freshest tree and how to keep it fresh whether it's a pre-cut, potted or cut your own Christmas tree.

Many people believe that cutting their own tree is the only way to insure a fresh tree. Well, I disagree and I will give you my reason. All woody plants reduce their moisture content as cooler temperatures prevail in fall. Deciduous trees drop their leaves during fall as part of their moisture reduction. Evergreens slow down their metabolism by reducing their moisture content by dropping older needles inside, underneath the canopy of foliage and by redirecting their moisture to the root system. This allows them to withstand the desiccating winds of old man winter. Therefore the growers cut their

trees prior to the moisture reduction period to ensure maximum moisture levels. After the trees are cut and handled will determine the freshness and safety of your tree.

Now I'm not saying cut your own is not fresh, I'm just pointing out what constitutes a fresh tree.

### CHOOSING A FRESH TREE

For many years I cared for 18 acres of Scots, pine and white spruce. I had always cut my trees prior to the moisture reduction time and piled them underneath a stand of maple and beech where they sat wet and shaded. After frosts the leaves covered the trees until Christmas. I also entertained a cut your own operation for five of those years and I will never forget watching people dragging their lime green trees past the emerald green pre-cut trees I had prepared. Both trees coming from the same field. For many, the tradition of Christmas would not be the same without that experience. So, whether it's pre-cut or cut fresh from the fields in December, look for dark colour in your tree, and ask yourself does it look dry and pale or soft and moist? A fresh tree will have good resistance to you pulling off any needles.

### CARING FOR YOUR TREE

After picking your one and only place the tree in cool spot in the house assuming you have shaken all abscised needles hiding in your tree just waiting for their chance to enhance your plush

rug. There are tree bags available now that are really easy to handle and contain all of the mess. So, just place it in the bag and let it sit at least one day so it can thaw out. When you set it up just leave the bag underneath for removal after the festive season. Before putting your tree in its stand recut the stem by removing approximately 2" thereby opening up the steam so it can draw water. A tree can draw a lot of water in the day so be careful and check it the next day. Water intake will depend on how dry your house and how well you prepared the tree. Think of it as a big cut flower and you will have a fresh safe tree.

Keep your tree away from heat sources and use your lights sparingly and never leave them on when you leave the house. Avoid combustible decorations and candles (sorry Charles).

You will enjoy a safe Christmas but what will you do with the tree after Christmas? Start a fire? Well, I recommend placing it in your compost or covering over delicate perennials. For those in country place it in the woods with string or popcorn to attract birds or small animals for observation. The children will love it.

I hope this information will help your family have a safe Christmas.

If you have any questions call the Grapevine Hotline - 833-2117 or write "The Town Gardener", R.R.2, Erin, Ont., NOBITO.





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