



## Growing Christmas Trees for Profit

Growing Christmas trees can be a very profitable use of land but like any enterprise attention to detail and forward planning is the key to success. Ideally the planting site should be weed free and fairly level with fertile, well drained soils. If your site is steep and infertile you should take more care in deciding which species to plant and be less optimistic in calculating your returns.

The Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*) is the traditional Christmas tree and is generally the cheapest and easiest to grow but slower growing and supposedly non – drop species such as Nordmann Fir (*Abies nordmanniana*) Fraser Fir (*Abies fraseri*) and Noble Fir (*Abies nobilis*) are now in favour. Whatever you decide to plant it should be planted as a transplanted seedling about 120 cm (4ft) apart (3000 per acre) and kept protected against weeds and rabbits and deer.

Weeds are best controlled with ground preparation and herbicides and the rabbits and deer with purpose erected fencing. Rabbit netting should be at least 1 metre high with the bottom edge buried in a trench to prevent bunnies digging under the fence. Bear in mind that roe deer find Christmas tree plantations to be lovely warm locations and that they will squeeze through narrow gaps in fence wire! Pruning and shearing trees that show a tendency to grow too fast and show 'bolted' leader growth is worthwhile as you will be left with a higher quality, better shaped, crop.

As the trees develop watch out for invasive bugs (such as spruce aphid) and think about how to market your trees in good time. Trees that cost, perhaps 50p when planting, will need 6-10 years of nurturing before they bring a return so many folks decide to cut out the middle man and sell direct to the customer. Pick your own, with an associated barn, where folk can buy seasonal food, drink and decorations creates the feel good factor but involves total commitment. Alternatively, cultivate a wholesale business selling to garages and green grocers. If potential customers are wary about committing themselves to an order consider supplying trees on sale or return.

Give some thought to how your Christmas Tree Farm will be managed. Planting in straight rows may make maintenance and harvesting easier but do you want regimented rows? Bear in mind that you will have to wait many years before you make a profit so inter row planting with an earlier maturing crop may make sense for you.

We supply small bare-rooted conifers suitable for planting out as Christmas trees between November and March. Typically plants are between 20 and 40cms tall and can be harvested as a 5-6 foot Christmas tree after a period of between 6 to 10 years.



**Norway Spruce** - (*Picea abies*) – Traditional British Christmas tree. Easy to establish but needs pruning (shearing) into shape.



**Fraser Fir** - (*Abies fraseri*) – Attractive tree with greyish green needles.

**Grand Fir** - (*Abies grandis*) – Large fleshy olive green needles with fragrant smell. Fast growing on moist well drained soil.



**Nordman Fir** – (*Abies nordmanniana*) – Slow growing, but generally disease resistant. Attractive tree with greyish green shining foliage.



**Blue Spruce** - (*Picea pungens glauca*) – Attractive blue tinge with dense habit. Slow growing. Best sold as a small pot grown tree.



**Serbian Spruce** - (*Picea omorika*) – Needles dark green above, glaucous beneath. Narrow habit with regular branches.

Regardless of your decisions, the selling of the trees for most folk is the best part of the operation. Buyers of Christmas trees tend to be loyal and good humoured! Growing Christmas trees should be the first step towards a truly Merry Christmas.



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