

# It All Adds Up: Steps You Can Take to Control Moisture Loss in Your Trees



A fresh cut Christmas tree can lose over half the water it contains in one day of abuse. That's one day exposed to sun and wind. In a few days of dry conditions, a tree can easily go from being fresh...to fried! Living trees are perishable. Dry trees lose color, branches stiffen, needles shed, and foliage can sun-scald. Any loss of moisture without the means of replenishing water degrades tree freshness. With average care, no single day might be stressful enough to fully sap freshness, but water losses are cumulative. At some point, your trees will lose the ability to easily take up water and your customer's experience with the product will be compromised.

The principles of keeping trees fresh are straight-forward—keep trees cool, dark and moist. Making that happen on buy retail lots can be difficult. But if chain store lots that handle 8,000 trees can put good tree care practices into place, independent retailers should be able to meet or exceed the care provided by mass merchants.

Any practice that protects trees from drying can make a difference. Shade can be provided by a tent, trees, or from the north side of a building. Water can be provided using saturated mulch, a shallow pool, a tree stand, or hand watering. Wind can be blocked by a fence, shade cloth, tent walls, or a stand of trees. Remember, the trees at the edge of the pile will suffer great exposure and suffer greater moisture losses than the average tree.

The challenge comes in protecting all of your trees most of the time. New deliveries overflow the site and trees can lie in the sun for hours. Many retailers protect stored or displayed trees but not both. Care needs to be continuous to insure freshness. Tree care practices need to accommodate both the tree inventory and the flow of customers. Pin stands with water bowls or bays with pools filled with water-saturated mulch are two ways to move trees quickly and keep them watered.

The freshness of your product depends on the care you provide. You make the choice to add, maintain, or subtract water from the trees on your lot. You either make it a priority with your staff or not. Your competition can also choose to make it a priority. You may use tree quality as a way to distinguish yourself from the competition, but keep in mind that freshness cuts across all grades of tree. Consumers will have a better experience with a fresh #2 tree than a dry premium. Savvy consumers will look for fresh trees and the signs that you are taking steps to keep your trees fresh.

## Examples of Cumulative Moisture in Christmas Trees on a Retail Lot

Stage in Care	Good Practice	Moisture Loss (remaining)	Bad Practice	Moisture Loss (remaining)
Tree shipped to Florida	Refer trailer used, night-time travel	-5% (95%)	Flatbed trailer used, daytime travel	-10% (90%)
Truck is unloaded at retail lot	Trees are unloaded within 2 hours	-5% (90%)	Trees are unloaded 8 hours later	-10% (80%)
Trees are stored temporarily for 24 hours in over full lot	North side of a building in partial shade	-2% (88%)	Laying in a pile on pavement in full sun	-10% (70%)
Trees are moved to normal storage area	Stood upright under natural shade or tent with sides	-2% (86%)	Laying in a pile in a lath house or a tent with no sides	-5% (65%)
Trees are displayed	In natural shade, a tent, or north side of a building	-2% (84%)	In full sun, a tent without sides, or southern exposure	-10% (55%)
Displayed trees are watered	Displayed in a water stand with evening misting of site	+10% (94%)	Displayed without a water stand or irrigation	-10% (45%)
Consumer buys tree & drives it home on top of car	Fresh cut made on trunk & care instructions given	-2% (92%)	No fresh cut & no care instructions given	-5% (40%)
Consumer displays tree in water	Tree is fresh enough to rehydrate	+5% (97%)	Tree is dry, trunk is sealed, and it will not rehydrate	-10% (30%)
Cumulative moisture loss	Tree holds up past New Years Day	<b>3%</b>	Tree is taken down early and replaced with a fake tree	<b>70%</b>