



# Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

June 2008

## *Special points of interest:*

- ◆ **Fall Meeting Reminder:**  
The NHVTCTA fall meeting will be held at Dave Olson's farm in Durham, N.H., on Saturday, Sept. 27. Registrations will be mailed as the meeting approaches.
- ◆ **Group Buying:**  
The NHVTCTA offers a number of group buying opportunities designed to help members cut costs. Call Jim Horst at (802) 447-1900 for more information.

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## Summer Meeting in Massachusetts

The NHVTCTA has accepted the invitation of the Massachusetts Christmas Tree Association ([www.christmas-trees.org](http://www.christmas-trees.org)) to participate in its 50th Anniversary Meeting, to be held June 26-28, 2008.

This gathering will take the place of the NHVTCTA's normal June meeting.

The event will be hosted by Ioka Valley Farm, Hancock, Mass. (the farm's Web site is [www.fair-point.net/~iokavalleyfarm](http://www.fair-point.net/~iokavalleyfarm)).

A registration form is available online on the Massachusetts Christmas Tree Association's Web site: [www.christmas-trees.org](http://www.christmas-trees.org).

Thursday, June 26, is set aside for exhibitor set-up and an evening "bull session" to discuss issues facing Christmas tree growers.

On Friday, a welcome and farm tour will take place in the morning, followed by an array of education sessions by expert presenters, covering topics such as genetics, shearing, insect control, sprayer calibration, soil and foliage testing, fertilization and more.

There will also be equipment demonstrations and a banquet dinner.

Saturday will feature a pancake breakfast before the 8:30 a.m. NHVTCTA business meeting. Sessions this day will focus on nursery operations, marketing, herbicides, wasp control, needle and root diseases and more.

Hotel information is available on the registration form.



## National Christmas Tree Association

Nigel Manley submits the following update on the activities of the national association:

### **Trees For Troops**

Fed Ex has again signed up for the national Trees for Troops (T4T) program this year and the NHVTCTA hopes to provide at least as many trees as we did last year. Nationally last year, 37.3 million consumers said that they heard about the program through various media. Try to think of novel ways to incorporate T4T on your farm or lot during the season. If you have a mail order business, offer the T4T option on your site as growers had success with this last season.



### **NCTA Convention/Show**

The national show will be held Aug 13-16, 2008, in Des Moines, Iowa. There are four educational themes: production, marketing, agri-tainment and business management. To get information go to [www.christmastree.org/convention08.cfm](http://www.christmastree.org/convention08.cfm)

### **Industry Marketing Order**

A task force has been formed to explore the idea of an industry "checkoff" program. The task force is gathering information about options and is creating a draft of what an order may look like prior to the 2008 convention. For more information visit [www.checkoffstudy.com](http://www.checkoffstudy.com). Get in touch with Nigel Manley with comments that can be returned to the task force.

## President's Message: Facing the Challenge

Like most people, we have some anxiety about the economic future. We've had a tough winter. Some extra tree losses because of heavy snow pack were the norm for most of us.

Now we're presented with ever increasing diesel fuel and gas prices; fertilizer that's up 30 to 40 percent; hesitation of banks to lend money; and higher cost of stamps to send advertising. Practically everything we use is going up in price.

What do we do? Stop mowing? Use less fertilizer? Cut out the annual newsletter? Wait a couple years on that new mower? Here's maybe the most difficult decision for some of us: do we raise prices...again?

No doubt we're all making adjustments to our farming and lifestyles.

One of the most important "tools" we all have to help us get through tough times is our memberships in the New Hampshire-

Vermont Christmas Tree Association and other associations. These memberships provide us the opportunity to ask and learn about what other members are doing.

Everyone has ideas on how to work more economically and you'll find the most members are more than happy to share those ideas.

Our Association also provides group buying programs. And there may be opportunities to create additional group buying agreements. Remember, it's just as tough on our suppliers as it is on us...they need our help too.

Have an idea to save us all money? Send it to Patrick White for *Tree Line*, or give get in touch with one of your state directors who can disseminate it throughout the membership.

My opinion that we need to push harder than normal when in a tough economy. Yes, we'll wait until the grass is a couple inches

higher before we mow it and we'll raise our prices as necessary to make ends meet. But, we also need to push harder in marketing trees, because I feel that those who lose their share of the market for just one year may never get it back. True, some customers may forego a Christmas tree when times are tough, but others will get one for the same reason.

Enter a tree competition at a fair this summer or fall and use the opportunity to talk to consumers about their ideas for challenging economic times...you'll probably gain a few customers in doing so.

*Most of all*, value your membership in our association and call upon other members for help and ideas to get through the challenges facing us all. Helping each other will make the tough times seem less painful

*Rich Rockwood,  
President*



## New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



### 2008 Officers

President	Rich Rockwood	(802) 685-4343
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### Alternate Directors

Russell Reay (VT)	(802) 492-3323	(2008)
Jay Weir (NH)	(603) 237-8617	(2008)

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### 2008 Tree Line Publication Schedule

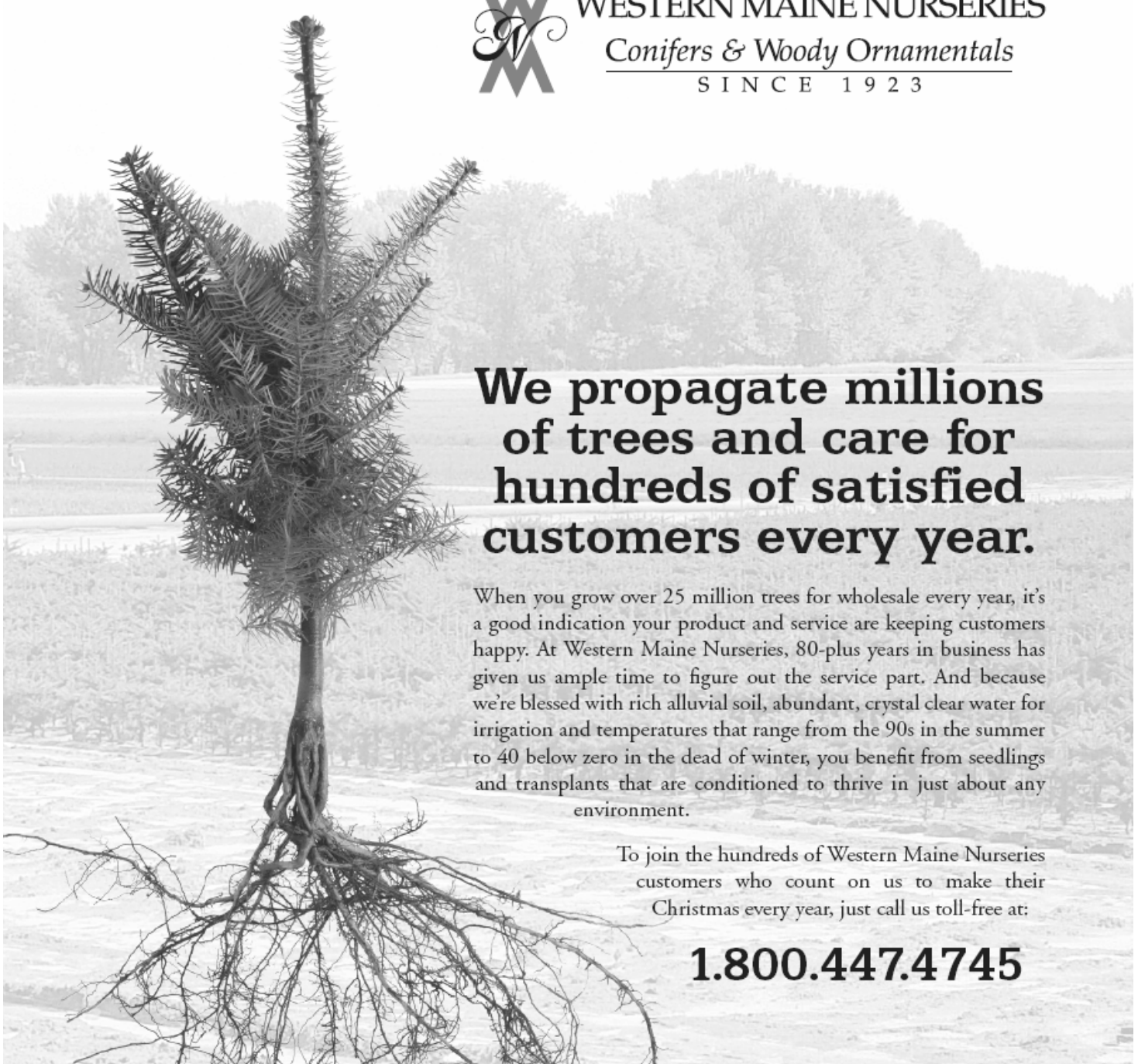
Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	December 22
June	May 16
September	August 22



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## Research Report: Needle loss

*Excerpted from Nova Scotia Agricultural College News*

Mason MacDonald's research lab gets lots of second glances from students and staff who walk by. With dozens of balsam fir cuttings on white paper on lab benches, the room has a Christmas feel to it.

The balsam fir tree is a lush, full and fragrant tree which makes it a popular choice for a Christmas tree in Atlantic Canada, and a mainstay of Nova Scotia's \$30-million-a-year Christmas tree industry.

According to Department of Natural Resources Christmas tree specialist Ross Pentz, tree sales have been declining while artificial tree sales have been increasing.

"One of the main reasons cited why customers are switching to artificial trees is because of needle loss," said Pentz.

MacDonald hopes to turn

that around with a doctoral research project he is conducting with the Atlantic Canada Christmas Tree Research Initiative to understand why Christmas trees lose their needles.

The Atlantic Canada Christmas Tree Research Initiative, launched in 2005 under the leadership of Nova Scotia Agricultural College (NSAC) professor Dr. Raj Lada, is a joint effort by producers, scientists, exporters and extension specialists from across Atlantic Canada with a goal of finding ways to help the Christmas tree industry.

This initiative is funded by the Christmas Tree Council of Nova Scotia, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program, which is delivered in Nova Scotia through Agri-Futures Nova Scotia.



Mason MacDonald in the research lab.

Mason says most people just assume that a Christmas tree sheds its needles because it's dry.

"This isn't the case," he says. "Even with daily watering, needle loss can occur. Measuring water potential within the tree confirms that the tree is not experiencing any significant water deficit."

The research team is studying the way the trees age (senescence) and the way they shed (abscission) in the hopes of creat-

*continued on page 6*



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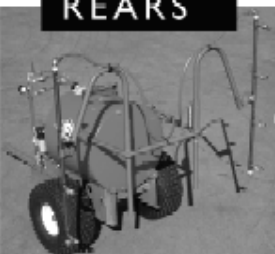


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## Research Report: Needle loss

*continued from page 4*

ing a SMART Christmas tree that holds on to its needles. And SMART in this case is aptly named, standing for "Senescence Modulating and Abscission Regulating Technologies."

The team is studying about 200 balsam fir clones from a Christmas tree seed orchard in Debert, looking for genetic resistance to needle shedding and more clones from other provinces will be targeted. Mr. MacDonald is evaluating the needle loss from cuttings on a daily basis.

"With this information, I'm trying to see which clone holds

needles the longest," he says.

Although the research is only in its initial stage, the team has already identified several clones with exceptional needle retention and are now working on identifying physical characteristics that might promote this holding power.

Research thus far shows that needle loss is a complex issue. "Cold acclimation is required for needle retention, with critical temperatures above zero," says Dr. Lada. "Temperatures below zero were found to cause severe damage," he says.

The research team is also investigating the role of ethylene

in needle loss. Ethylene is a plant hormone that causes fruit to ripen and plays a role in the dropping of leaves and a plant's death.

In addition to the lab research, the team is also looking at the effect production methods in the industry have on needle loss. "Mechanical stress occurs during transit or when moving trees," says Mason. "This may also play a role in needle loss."

MacDonald is registered for his PhD program at Laval University but is conducting his research at Nova Scotia Agricultural College under the supervision of Dr. Lada.



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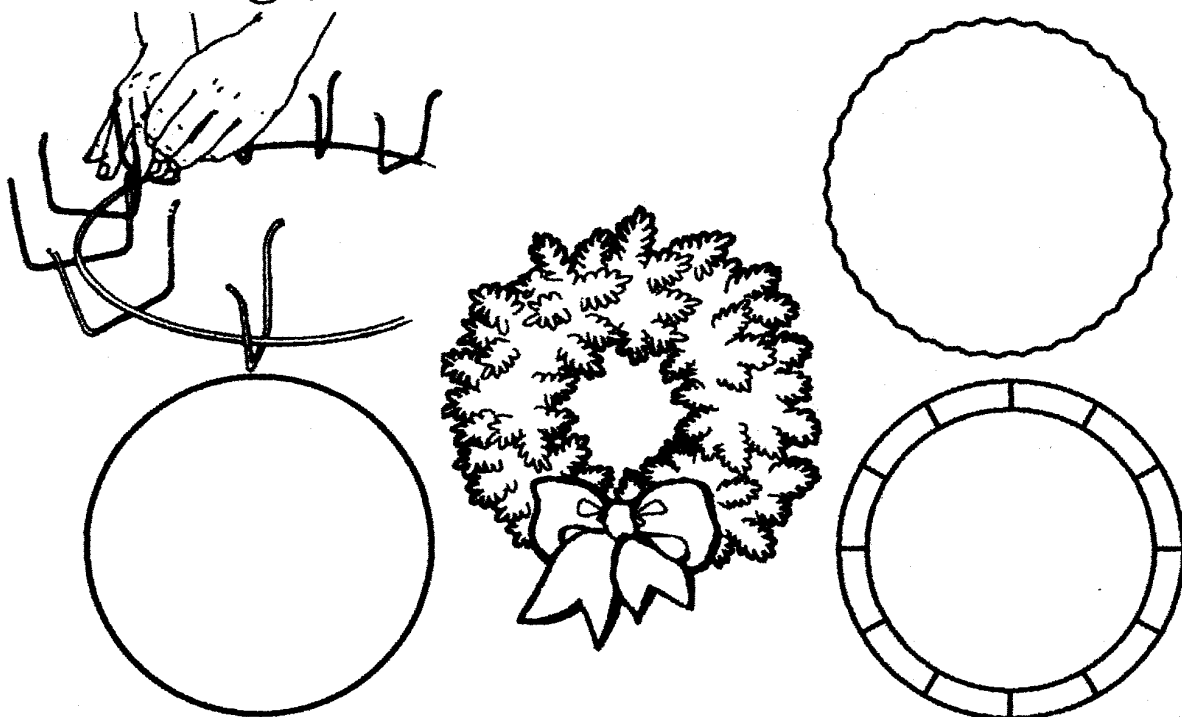
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## Monitoring Firs for Disease and Insects to Minimize Pesticide Applications

*By Ronald Kelley, Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation*

### General Monitoring

Periodic examination of Christmas trees throughout the year will help one detect many pests before they become a problem. Late winter and early spring is a good time to begin monitoring because this is usually off-season for many growers and past damage from balsam twig aphid, spruce spider mite and many diseases is usually visible. Early detection of potential problems allows time to deal with them before the next marketing season. It's a good idea to carry pruning shears and plastic flagging during these examinations. Trees of concern can be flagged for later survey or collection of samples. Damaged or diseased shoots or stems can be pruned from the trees. Good records should be kept of monitoring observations and survey results.

### Balsam Twig Aphid Survey

A survey for balsam twig aphid stem mothers can be conducted in the spring to predict populations on balsam fir before injury occurs. This should be done when buds begin to swell and show green beneath the bud sheath and up until initial bud-break. This survey is best conducted when temperatures exceed 60 degrees F. If colder than that, stem mothers may be resting in protected locations and not easily dislodged. Survey a minimum of 10-30 trees per block, selecting trees scattered throughout. It works well to walk along a diagonal line through the block and sample trees nearest the line of travel. Sampling 30 trees is best if initial aphid counts are low or numbers per tree are highly variable but fewer trees may suffice if populations are high or fairly consistent per tree.

To do this, use a white or black board that is one square

foot in size, place the board beneath a mid-crown branch of each selected tree and lightly beat the branch with a stick to dislodge the aphids. Make sure that the end of the branch is over the board. Count and record the number of aphids from each branch, then remove the aphids. Aphids should be light green or whitish. They may be seen walking along on the board but do not rapidly scurry off like some non-target insects. When done, divide the total aphids by the number of trees sampled to determine the average number of aphids per square foot. The following predictions are based on Vermont data gathered over many years.

*Predicting population levels based on stem mother surveys:*

- (1) If fewer than 1 aphid per square foot, damage is likely to remain light.
- (2) If 1 or more aphids per square foot, there is a potential for moderate to heavy damage to occur.
- (3) If 6 or more aphids per square foot, moderate to heavy damage is likely.

Control for this insect is most important if trees are within 2-3 years of harvest. Cut and Choose customers tend to tolerate more twig aphid damage than wholesale buyers. One study done in the Lake Sates showed that Cut and Choose customers seldom noticed the damage if fewer than 50% of the shoots were affected.

Surveys for overwintering eggs can be conducted if the grower has quality magnification equipment, knows what to look for and needs more lead time. But this survey is less reliable for prediction than the stem mother survey. Terminal shoots are collected during late winter to early spring from just above mid-crown for 30 trees per block. Shoots are examined under good lighting and a magnification of 15 to 20X and number of eggs per shoot recorded.

*Predicting population levels based on egg surveys:*

- (1) If egg counts are near 0 per shoot for 30 shoots, damage is likely to be light or not noticeable.
- (2) If egg counts average 1 or more per shoot, there is a potential for moderate to heavy damage to occur. It is a good idea to follow this up with a stem mother survey to verify that there are high populations.

### Spider Mite Survey

Surveys for spruce spider mites can be conducted using a beating survey similar to that described for balsam twig aphid. This survey should be conducted after eggs hatch in late May to early June. This is usually at 120 to 180 Growing Degree Days or when apples are in bloom. Spider mites show up as little dots about the size of a pin head on the sampling board and stain red when squashed. If mites have been a problem in the past but none are detected during the first survey of the growing season, repeat the survey in another week or two in case hatch was delayed.

Mite populations can increase dramatically and produce many generations per year so if mites are present, it may be advisable to resurvey every 2-3 weeks throughout the growing season.

*Predicting mite population levels:*

If more than 5 mites per square foot, high populations are likely.

### Balsam Gall Midge Monitoring

Since populations of balsam gall midge are cyclical, usually about 7 years apart, light damage on scattered individual trees appears before the insect becomes a problem. These initial trees can be identified by careful scouting and flagged as sentry trees to monitor for adult midges or increases in damage in the next year. Most galled needles fall by early winter so damage is most



## Monitoring Firs (continued)

easily detected between mid-summer and the first of October. Since gall midge adults are weak fliers, these initial trees often occur in wind-protected areas such as in low lying areas or near the edge of woods.

Using the sentry trees, monitor these just after bud break for gall midge adults laying eggs. This is best done on a warm day or evening when there is little wind. If multiple midges are seen on individual buds, expect heavy damage.

The major biological control is an almost identical good midge that builds up its populations over time and out-competes the gall midge. So near the end of an outbreak, this good midge may be the predominant one observed on buds, yet there is probably no need for control at this point.

### Balsam Shootboring Sawfly Survey

Since this insect is heaviest in even years, survey for this pest should be considered for even years when damage during the previous year was heavy enough

to be of some concern. Adults can be monitored by hanging yellow 3x5 inch sticky cards in the mid-crowns of sentry trees. Use two branches per tree for a minimum of 5 trees per block. Edge trees are usually preferred. Cards should be placed about mid-April and adults counted periodically till just before budbreak.

*Predicting shootboring sawfly damage:*

(1) If an average of 2 or fewer adults per card, expect little damage.

(2) If 5 or more adults per card, this can result in heavy damage.

### Monitoring for Disease

Damage from foliar diseases is best detected during the growing season before infected needles are cast. Needles infected by some fungi can persist for a long time while others do not. Some needles killed by *Rhizosphaera* needle blight will persist through the winter but light current infection will be easiest to detect during mid to late summer. Damage from fir-fern rust is most easily

detected in July, soon after infected needles turn yellow but before they drop (by the end of summer). Needles killed by *Lirula* needle-cast are very persistent and should be visible any time of year. Shoots killed by *Delphinella* shoot blight should be visible most of the year but are most obvious when the recently killed needles are present in mid to late summer.

Shoots killed by *Diplodia* persist for a long time but scouting is best done before budbreak, removing infected shoots before they produce spores that can infect new shoots. Witches brooms caused by yellow broom rust of fir can also be removed at this time before they produce spores that infect the chickweed alternate host.

These witches brooms break bud just before normal balsam fir shoots break, so if brooms are prevalent, scouting at this time is ideal. Scouting for root diseases is best done at any time of the year that one can easily examine roots and root collars to determine the causal organism.

## Buy Local

Given increased competition from "fake" trees, buy local campaigns could be a great asset to growers in New Hampshire and Vermont. Nigel Manley points out that one way to take advantage of this consumer shopping trend is to join NH Made, which is already marketing many products from local farmers and artisans. Visit [www.nhmade.org](http://www.nhmade.org).

Only 27 percent of households buy a real tree. Although the total number of real tree purchases went up last year, they only reached the 27% level. 17 million plastic trees were purchased in 2006. Buy local campaigns will help customers to purchase real (locally grown) Christmas trees.

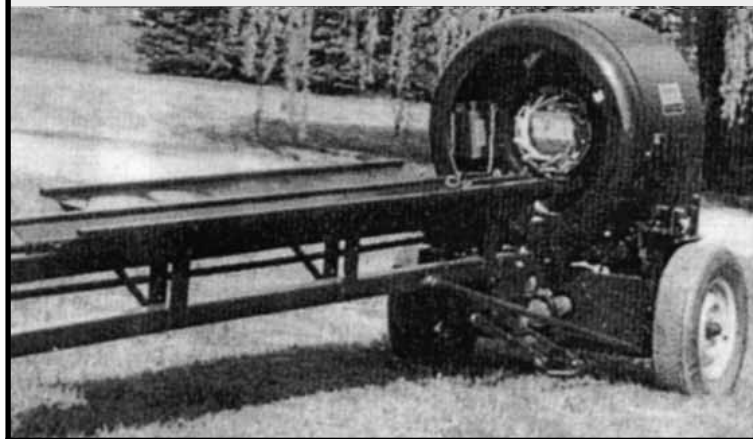
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## Fraser fir shearing strategies

*Contributed by Bob White*

In the last couple years there has been some new methods discussed for pruning fraser fir. In 2006 at the Quebec Meeting I met a family from the Lake Magentic area. They told of a method where they pruned four times per year, the advantage they found was if a branch or leader was sheared at the right time a new bud would form at the point of the cut that would point straight out which helped the tree fill out and look more natural.

In 2007 we invited Patrick Downey to share his pruning methods that he uses, he did an outstanding presentation showing the three step method that he is using at our meeting last fall.

At the fall 2007 Quebec meeting I was able to spend time with Richard Downey who was very excited and happy to go over the details that he uses with me.

He asked that I share the methods with growers in our area. He feels this method allows a marketable 7-foot tree to be grown in 7 years as it stops the normal mistakes that we commonly have with Fraser pruning.

This spring while traveling in Quebec I stopped at the Downey plantations to see if there was a noticeable difference in the trees once this method is applied.

It was very noticeable: The top whorl had formed new buds pointing straight out on about 80 percent of the branches. The trees looked great.

So the short version of this process is as follows:

### Step 1

**\*This is the important step**

#### In mid-June:

- Select one leader, cut out any additional leaders. Do not shear the leader that you choose to keep.

- Cut the ends off the top whorl branches. (This can usually be done with one cut.)

### Step 2

**In normal shearing time (usually July/Aug):**

- Shear the tree sides as we traditionally have done.

### Step 3

**In September:**

- Shear the leader

Dick identifies what he calls the "false whorls;" there typically are two on a strong leader. These are described as a cluster of four or five (or more) buds grouped together.

He tries to pick two buds that are 2 inches or more above one of these false whorls and cuts the leader above those two buds.

This methods allows the tree to establish a couple leaders and use the many buds in the false whorl as side branches.

I noticed most tops were cut in the 12-inch range.

Dick says this method also works with balsam but is not cost effective due to the lower price of balsam.

Good luck, give it a try, there maybe other methods out there to try but this one looks pretty simple and works on a large scale.

We are very fortunate to have members that are willing to share their methods in an attempt to help all growers improve the trees that come from our region.

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- Late April
- Early May

Questions?? contact **Bill Asack** evenings 6-8 p.m. 1-802-754-6934

Season	Seedlings	Tree Age	Price per Seedling	Qty	Total
Fall 2008/Spring 2009	Balsam Fir: Mountain Strain Vermont Seed Source	2-2	\$0.65		
Fall 2008/Spring 2009	Balsam Fir: Cooks Strain Vermont Seed Source	2-2	\$0.65		
Fall 2008/Spring 2009	Canaan Fir: West Virginia Seed Source	2-2	\$0.75		
Fall 2008/Spring 2009	Balsam-Fraser Hybrids: Vermont Seed Source	2-2	\$0.65		
Fall 2008/Spring 2009	Fraser Fir: North Carolina Seed Source	2-2	\$0.65		

**Total Seedling Cost**

**Terms:**

**Payment:** 25% Deposit, remaining balance due 3 weeks before ship date. Note: Deposits are nonrefundable.

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All Buyers purchasing seedlings and transplants for production of products for sale on a farm, nursery or green house are exempt from Vermont sales tax. (Requires completion of state of Vermont Agriculture Sales Tax exemption Certificate form S-3A)

Vermont Residents Add 6% sales tax	
Add 25% of total seedling cost for Shipping Via UPS ground.	
<b>Total Cost (Sum of the 3 lines above)</b>	
Payment (amount to be charged or enclosed with form)	
Balance Due (Amount owed before ship date if any).	

**Payment Information:**

- Check enclosed
- Pay with Credit Card
- VISA
- MASTERCARD

Amount to charge \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Card Holder \_\_\_\_\_

Purchasers Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Billing Information (incomplete or incorrect information will delay shipment of orders)**

Bill to Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

## Editor's Desk

A number of newsworthy items have crossed my desk since the last issue of *Tree Line*.

### Vermont Farm Show

Mary and George Gilbert of Gilbert's Tree Farm in Williamstown, Vt., had the winning balsam fir at this year's Vermont Farm Show.

### Summer Marketing

Rich and Steph Rockwood are always looking for help in staffing booths/tree displays at Tunbridge World's Fair, September 11-14, 2008, and New England Exposition (Big E) September 24-28, 2008. They are also looking for trees, business cards, brochures, and other promotional material for both events. Contact Rich at (802) 685-4343, or by e-mail at [redrock.farm@hughes.net](mailto:redrock.farm@hughes.net).

### Winter Gathering

The first annual North East Christmas Convention and Trade Show is coming up January 22-24, 2009, at the Saratoga Convention Center, Saratoga, New York. Stay tuned for more details in future issues of *Tree Line*.

### Director Nominations

Anyone interested in running for one of the NHVTCTA directors positions to be voted on later this summer should contact (for those in Vermont) Bob White or (for those in New Hampshire) Ben Hoyt, or call Jim Horst at (802) 447-1900 for more details.

### New England Pest Info

Marshall Patmos, UNH Cooperative Extension Emeritus, was in touch to report that the

March 2008 New England Christmas Tree Pest Management course at Keene State College was considered a success and as always generated many positive comments from attendees. UNH Cooperative Extension has compiled the reference materials provided in the course and made them available on the UNH Cooperative Extension Web site at [http://extension.unh.edu/Forestry/Christmas\\_Tree\\_PM.htm](http://extension.unh.edu/Forestry/Christmas_Tree_PM.htm)

### Omer Ahern

The NHVTCTA was saddened to learn of the passing of Omer Ahern, father of recent Association President Mike Ahern and a Christmas tree farmer for more than half-a-century. Our condolences to Mike and his family.



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