

Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

June 2011

Special point of interest:

- ♦ **NHVTCTA Board of Directors:**
Anyone interested in running for a position on the NHVTCTA's Board of Directors should contact Jay Weir at (603) 237-8617.
- ♦ **VT Farm Show Board:**
There may be an opening for a position representing our Association on the Board of the VT Farm Show. To learn more, contact Rich Rockwood at (802) 685-4343.
- ♦ **Farms for Sale?:**
On occasion, the NHVTCTA receives calls inquiring about possible tree farms for sale. If anyone has or knows of any, please let Jim Horst know, (802) 447-1900.

NHVTCTA Summer Meeting Preview

The NHVTCTA's summer meeting will be held Saturday, June 25, at Bill Tester's Farm in Barton, Vt.

On the agenda for the meeting are presentations on:

- Tree Flagging Systems – Dan Beloin, Beloin Tree Farms, Colebrook, NH
- Field Tour, Fertilizer/Soils Issues and Tour of the Farm - Bill Tester
- Pest Management and Extreme Weather Influences – Ron Kelley, Retired VT Forest

and Parks Forest Management Specialist

One of the highlights of the meeting will be a discussion of Foliar and Soil Testing and Fertilizer Recommendations, with Q and A via phone based upon observations from field tour with Bill Huxster, Emeritus Professor of Forestry, NC State University. For more information on this topic, see page 4.

If you have not already registered for the meeting, contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-1900.

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National Convention & Trade Show

The 2011 National Christmas Tree Association Convention & Trade Show will be held Aug. 10-13 at Sawmill Creek Resort in Huron, Ohio. Just some of the many topics to be covered in the education sessions are:

- Estate Planning for a Smooth Transition – *David L. Marrison, The Ohio State University*
- Stock Types of Planting Products – *Jim Rockis, Reliable Source*
- Easy Solutions to Mastering Social Media – *Katy Walterscheidt, Evergreen Farms*



Christmas Trees

- Using Wreaths, Greens and Savvy Marketing to Grow Your Business – *Shannon Kuhrt, M&M Wintergreens*
- Bridging the Gap from Wholesale to the Consumer – *Roger Blackwell*
- Canaan Fir Research at OSU/OARDC – *Dr. Jim Brown & Dr. Randall Heiligmann*

In addition to many other educational programs, a number of farm tours and other special events. Visit the NCTA Web site for more details and registration information, www.christmastree.org.

President's Message:

The late spring is finally behind us and hopefully everyone is caught up with their work! I was close to three full weeks behind from last year getting started and there is no way to catch up from that. Who knows, maybe winter will come three weeks later this year....yeah right!

There have been some great opportunities for the association to get some grant money for marketing, specialty crops, and silviculture programs through the NH Department of Agriculture and the Vermont Agricultural Agency. The directors have secured some grants in the past couple of years to start some excellent programs such

as television ads, website updates, and fair participation for this association and the NH Christmas Tree Promotion Board. This year some of the grant money was passed up because there were no ideas on the table to apply for. If any member has ideas associated with growing or marketing Christmas trees that will benefit the industry or the association please contact myself or any of the directors to get the ball rolling with grant money to facilitate these improvements or ideas. This money is available and will be spent on other crops if we do not apply. If the government is willing to help us promote our trees lets take advantage.

Please join us at Bill Testers farm in Barton, VT on June 25 at our annual summer meeting. The program started by Bob White where each host farm has nutrient and PH recommendations done through soil and foliar tests is really taking off and providing some of the most helpful information I have seen in a long time. There is so much to learn in this area and this program is a great way for all members to benefit by comparing the host farms' problems or successes to their own farm. Hope to see everyone there!

*Jay Weir
President*



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



2011 Officers

| | | |
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| President | Jay Weir | (603) 237-8617 |
| Vice President | Mary Lou Schmidt | (802) 257-0233 |
| Recording Secretary | Russell Reay | (802) 492-3323 |
| Exec. Secretary/Treas. | Jim Horst | (802) 447-1900 |
| Past President | Rich Rockwood | (802) 685-4343 |

Contact Information

Jim Horst, Executive Secretary
 569 Pleasant Valley Road
 Bennington, VT 05201-9637
 Phone: (802) 447-1900
 E-mail: info@nh-vtchristmastree.org
 Association Web site: www.nh-vtchristmastree.org

2011 Directors (Term Ends)

| | | |
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| Dan Beloin | (603) 237-8633 | (2012) |
| Mike Godzyk | (603) 237-5702 | (2013) |
| Ben Hoyt | (603) 838-6403 | (2013) |
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| Bill Tester | (802) 525-3814 | (2012) |
| Bob White | (802) 899-4924 | (2011) |
| Patrick White | (802) 772-2880 | (2012) |

For matters related to Tree Line only:

Patrick White, Editor
 NHVTCTA Tree Line
 18 Merritt Road
 Middlesex, VT 05602
 Phone: (802) 223-3880
 E-mail: pwhitevt@aol.com

2011 Tree Line Publication Schedule


| Issue | Ad/Submission Deadline |
|-----------|------------------------|
| January | -- |
| June | -- |
| September | Sept. 2 |



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NHVTCTA Tree Improvement project

By Bob White

We would like to thank all the farms who have shared their soil and foliar testing data with the Association.

We have seen enough results now to understand that we generally all have the same issues, one way or another.

As discussed previously pH is a serious issue for most if not all of us, generally our soil nutrients are pretty low, tree nutrients are also low and off balanced.

That said it is amazing how well some trees can look, where testing shows the trees have a significant lack of nutrients, while other fields with the same issues look pretty poor. So there is plenty to learn as we move forward.

Often we see strong healthy trees until we change a field from balsam to Fraser or start a new rotation, then it

often gets more difficult for most of us.

The good news is it's not that difficult to learn how to improve our tree quality, other tree growing regions have had the same issues that we all have and have found methods to help the farms.

We are seeking out people around the country who might be willing to help us better understand methods that could improve tree quality and inviting them to present at future meetings.

For Bill Testers meeting we again hired Bill Huxster from North Carolina. His methods have been tested for many years in Fraser fir.

A few observations so far.
1. We generally have problems taking soil and foliar samples, the labs are looking at parts per million of sub-

Continued on Page 8

The Value of Soil and Plant Tissue Tests

*By Bill Huxster, Professor Emeritus,
N.C. State University*

At the NHVTCTA Summer Meeting, you will be visiting a small portion of Bill Tester's Christmas tree operation, as he has plantings over a 50 mile radius of the home farm. You probably will not see his best trees, but you will have an opportunity to evaluate in detail a third rotation Balsam planting with 4-6 ft. trees. Foliage had fair color last fall BUT the trees have poor density, bud-set and over-all vigor. Keep in mind there were no problems with the first and second tree crop.

A good representative soil sample of average trees was taken along with plant tissue. The soil indicated a high pH coupled with low P, K, Mg and B. The plant tissue was high in P, K and Ca. The Fe to Mn ratio was 1:1 but on the low side. Mg, B and Cu were all very low. Without the tissue sample there was NO WAY to see that the trees were very deficient in Boron and Copper.

There are some other things tied with drainage and the past herbicide program that have affected root uptake. Five other fields are under study by me. Ph's range from 5.0 to 6.4. Spring 2011 fertilizer program include 2 granular and 4 foliar mixes.

A very detailed look at the laboratory results and my recommendations will all be available at the Bill Tester farm. Bring your soil, foliar tests and your questions. The group will be able to share experiences and thinking about these issues.

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Site Selection for Planting Christmas Trees

By John F. Ahrens

Traditionally, Christmas trees have been grown on sites not suitable for growing other crops. That has changed somewhat in recent years. However, the ideal site for Christmas trees still has soil that is slightly acidic, well-drained sandy or silt loam with high organic matter. As with other crops, the best soil can produce the best trees in the shortest time. Christmas trees will not survive or grow well in swamps, but all but the wettest sites allow planting some species for Christmas trees. Most growers already have the land and "it is what it is". They just want to make the best use of it.

The place to start in finding out what soils on your farm are like is to consult the local NRCS (National Resources Conservation Service)

and get a soils map of your property. You can also go online and search for the following website: websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/. Not only will you find out the kinds of soil your farm is composed of, but you will learn their characteristics and capabilities for growing various crops. In Connecticut it is common to find several different soil types on the same property, with different capabilities for growing Christmas trees. In fact, the soil types commonly change within the same fields, often in the same rows, making species selection a great challenge.

A common misconception among growers is that sloping land is well drained. Imperfectly-drained and poorly-drained soils frequently occur on slopes as well as on flat lands. A soils map of your farm will point out many of

these areas. Sloping land usually has good air drainage, however, and frost pockets often occur on low lands where low temperatures settle.

Selecting Site For Transplant Beds - One can save a lot of money by buying 2- or 3-year-old seedlings and planting them in beds for 2 or 3 more years, in contrast to buying more expensive transplants (2-3 year-old seedlings grown for an additional 2 years in transplant beds), or more commonly today, as plugs plus one or plugs plus two. However, choosing the site for transplant beds is extremely important. The site should be well-drained, high enough to avoid late spring frosts and preferably to have access to irrigation.

Selecting Site For Field Plantings - Before planting the first Christmas tree in the field, it is important to consider how the trees will be marketed - wholesale (for resale) or retail (direct sale to consumers), often referred to as "choose and cut", where the customer chooses the tree and either the customer or the owner cuts it. Wholesale production usually requires larger acreage for trees but does not require the parking areas for customers that "choose and cut" operations do.

I believe that retail growers can profitably grow and sell any species suited to their land. Needle retention is rarely a problem with current

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Site Selection (continued)

tail sales, because trees are usually harvested late, (Thanksgiving and later), whereas trees sold wholesale usually are cut earlier and are subject to more drying on sales lots before setup by customers. Superior needle retention is the main reason that Fraser fir (*Abies fraseri*) has become so popular with consumers of Christmas trees. Growers also like the fact that Fraser fir breaks bud later than most species and, therefore, frequently escapes late spring frosts that can make trees unsaleable in that year.

Unfortunately, Fraser fir has other features that make it a questionable choice for retail producers. It does not tolerate imperfectly-drained or poorly-drained soils and these soils are too common in Connecticut and all New England. Trying to grow Fraser fir on these sites usually results in high mortality, sometimes in the first or second years, but often a year or two before harvest; following a wet season. Fraser fir should only be planted on well-drained soils. Raised beds can partially

solve this problem, but they require machinery that many small growers do not have or cannot afford. Whitetail deer love to browse on Frasers and in areas with high deer populations, Fraserfir is impossible to grow without expensive fencing or repellents.

What about balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), the most widely grown Christmas tree from northern New England, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces of Canada. It was formerly thought that balsam fir could not be successfully grown in southern New England. However, in the 1970s we found that balsam fir can be grown in southern New England, provided vegetation is controlled. This is true of all firs. In general, balsam fir is more tolerant than Fraser fir of wet soil, but is not as tolerant as Canaan fir (*Abies balsamea* var. *phanerolepsis*). However, there are many seed sources of balsam fir that display varying tolerances of wet soil, times of bud break and desirability for Christmas tree culture. One of these is Sheet Harbor balsam, which

comes from certain shoreline areas in Nova Scotia. Sheet Harbor balsam are Fraser-like in some respects and have sometimes been sold as a northern source of Canaan fir. However, they do not have the tolerance of wet soil conditions and frost pockets that Canaan fir exhibits. In general, balsam firs are suitable for both wholesale and retail Christmas tree production on moderately well-drained sites but not in frost pockets.

A better choice for imperfectly or poorly-drained soils is Canaan or West Virginia balsam which is faster growing and breaks bud later than Fraser fir. Canaan fir, therefore, is an excellent choice for low areas (frost pockets). While current Canaan fir seed sources do not have the needle retention of Fraser fir, their tolerance of wetter sites, faster growth and later bud break, make them an excellent choice for retail growers.

All true firs (*Abies* species) and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) are subject to damage from browsing deer, so in areas of heavy deer populations, white spruce (*Picea glauca*), Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*) and white pine (*Pinus strobus*), which are bothered less by deer, can usually be grown for retail sales.

White spruce is easy to grow and tolerates a wide range of soil conditions, in addition to having stiff branches that hold ornaments well. It is moderately tolerant of wet soil conditions, but it often develops crooked

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Tree Improvement Project (continued)

Continued from Page 4

stances. Using old buckets to collect samples in, dirty tools and hands just doesn't work well and contamination happens. Fertilizer is expensive enough without getting a bad recommendation and putting the wrong material on the ground due to a bad sample.

2. General fertilizers like 10-10-10 have a high amount of rock fillers in them to balance out the ton. In some blends close to half the mix is just filler rock. This rock is pretty expensive to truck

around etc. Suggest custom ordering the material you need based on a soil and foliar test, it might be a lot cheaper and more effective for your trees.

3. Every ton of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizer you have used over the years removes close to a ton of lime from your soils. Don't be surprised when you see soil analysis results that indicate you need several tons per acre of dolomite lime applied. Most likely it took years to create the shortage and will take years to correct. Be careful to

not over apply lime attempting to quickly correct the problem.

4. Two materials do not move well in soils unless worked in (Lime and Phosphorus), they generally just stay in the top lay of soil. Any methods that you can use to mix these into your soil would be beneficial for the tree.

If you would like to share your farm's data with the association for all to learn from please bring a copy to the meeting or send it via e-mail to Bob White at: Whitechristmasvt@gmail.com

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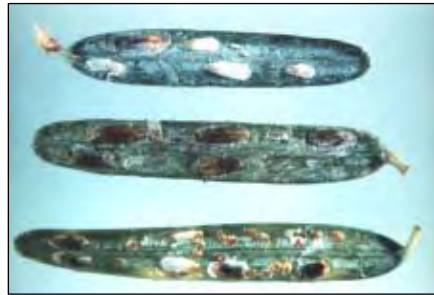
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Be Vigilant for Elongate Hemlock Scale

The Forest Health Bureau with the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands would like Christmas tree growers to be aware of a forest pest, Elongate Hemlock Scale, which may impact Christmas trees and other native conifers.



Elongate Hemlock Scale is an armored scale insect pest approximately 1.5mm or 2mm long. It feeds on coniferous vegetation causing needle loss and dieback which greatly reduces the health and vigor of the host tree, particularly at greater insect populations. It is a pest that has affected forests from the mid-Atlantic states to southern New Eng-

land. More recently, it has been found in southern New Hampshire. Elongate Hemlock Scale can develop and reproduce on 43 conifer species. Spruce and fir are more susceptible than hemlock so Christmas tree growers are in a unique position to provide early detection of this pest.

If you are a New Hamp-

shire Christmas Tree Grower and think you have an incidence of Elongate Hemlock Scale on your property, please contact your county extension forester for a consultation or you can contact Kyle Lombard at the Forest Health Bureau with the NH Division of Forests and Lands: kyle.lombard@dred.state.nh.us Or call Jennifer Wiemer at (603) 271-2214.

Vermont Christmas tree growers should also be vigilant and can report sightings to the appropriate Vermont forest health protection staff, contact information online at www.vtfrp.org.



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| Balsam Fir: Cooks Strain Vermont Seed Source | Spring 2012 | 2-2 | \$0.80 |
| Canaan Fir: West Virginia Seed Source | Spring 2012 | 2-2 | \$0.90 |
| Balsam-Fraser Hybrids: Vermont Seed Source | Spring 2012 | 2-2 | \$0.80 |
| Fraser Fir: North Carolina Seed Source | Spring 2012 | 2-2 | \$0.80 |

| Seed Type | Viable Seeds Per Pound | Price Per Viable seed | Price Per Pound |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Balsam Fir: Mountain Strain Vermont Seed Source | 26,000 | \$0.015 | \$390 |
| Balsam Fir: Cooks Strain Vermont Seed Source | 14,000 | \$0.015 | \$210 |
| Balsam-Fraser Hybrids: Vermont Seed Source | 13,000 | \$0.015 | \$195 |

Questions?? contact Bill Asack evenings 6-8 pm. 1-802-754-6934

Group Buying Opportunities: Stands and Wreath Rings

Cinco Plastics has offered NHVTCTA members a very special price on their 4 sizes of tree stands and their Automatic Water System. In addition, since all of our orders will be shipped together to our September meeting at Mike Ahern's farm in Plymouth, NH., there will be a substantial savings in shipping costs.

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Site Selection (continued)

Continued from Page 7

stems on shallow soil or on poorly-drained sites. It also has poorer needle retention than Colorado spruce or the firs. It is still well suited for well-drained or imperfectly-drained soils on "choose and cut" farms.

Although it is fast growing and is tolerant of most sites except the driest ones, white pine is not as popular with customers in the Northeast because it has weak branches that make it difficult to decorate with heavy ornaments.

True firs grow well on soils that have a pH (acidity level) of about 5 to 6 (moderately to slightly acidic) but often show foliage yellowing at pH levels above 6.0. This problem has been observed on land formerly planted with corn, which is usually limed to pH levels of 6.0 to

6.5 for good growth. Before planting, pH levels on all soils should be checked and modified, if necessary, possibly with sulfur or ammonium sulfate fertilizer to lower the acidity or lime to raise it, depending on the conifer to be grown. Colorado spruce and Douglas-fir do well at pH levels of 6 to 6.5, for example.

Two species to be avoided for Christmas tree production, for the most part, are Norway spruce and Scots pine. Norway spruce is notorious for poor, but unpredictable, needle retention and Scots pine for its often crooked stems and its susceptibility to attack from several insects and diseases.

Douglas-fir has excellent needle retention, but the fastest growing and most popular Lincoln strain is very susceptible to the ubiquitous Rhabdochloa and

Swiss needle cast diseases. Therefore, Douglas-fir is successfully grown only by those who have the equipment to spray two or three times a season. It also is intolerant of imperfectly or poorly-drained soils.

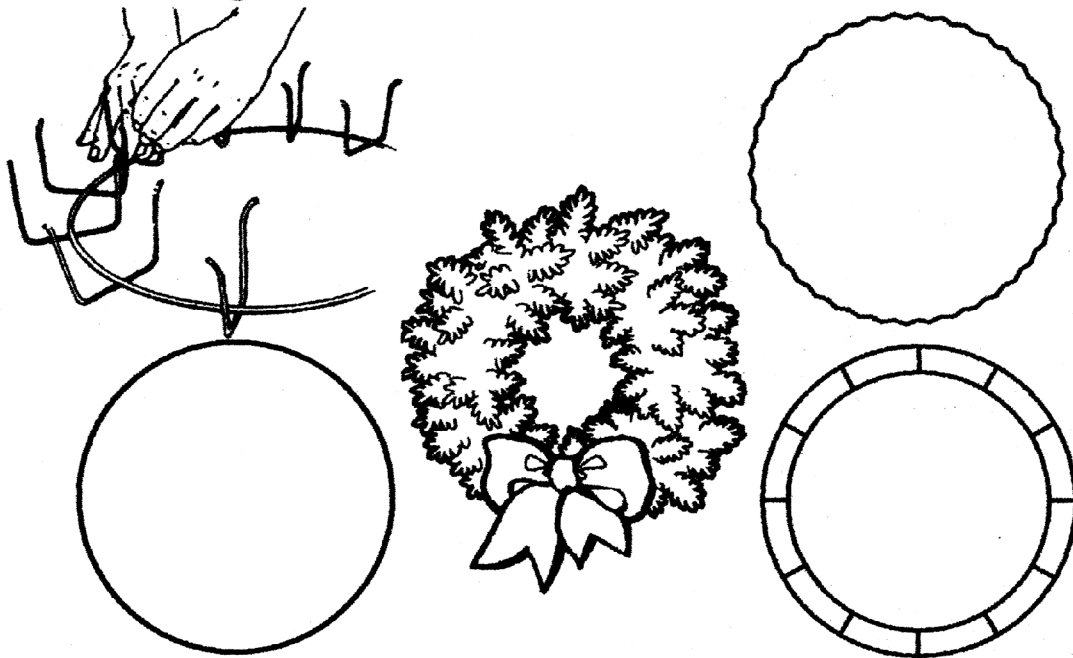
Exotics – Exotics are tree species that are not native to the area or have not been widely grown here in the past. These include species like Concolor fir (*Abies concolor*), Turkish fir (*Abies born-muelleri*), Nordmann fir (*Abies nordmanniana*), Meyer spruce (*Picea meyeri*) and many others. Our advice is to try them out on a small scale – say 50 to 100 of each. Be sure to record the seed source and supplier, so you might be able to repeat the planting some 7 to 9 years later.

Originally published in the Connecticut Christmas Tree Growers' Real Tree newsletter.

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Vermont Farm Show

VT Farm Show Moving

The Vermont Farm Show, which has been held in past years in Barre, will be moving to the Champlain Valley Expo in Essex Junction, Vt. Next year's event is scheduled for three days, beginning Tuesday, Jan. 24.

According to WCAX in Vermont, "Organizers say they were running out of room at the Barre Civic Center and Auditorium where it has been held. And the bigger space allows them to do more things."

"One of the biggest things is space availability which there is a lot more at

Chittenden, the Champlain Valley Exposition. So we can do more with the public, we can do more presentations; we can have more meetings on site. It got to the point the grower groups were off site like the Christmas tree growers. We can all be under the same site for Vermont Agriculture," said Jon Turmel, the manager of the Vermont Farm Show.

The NHVTCTA winter meeting will also be moving to the new location, allowing us the opportunity to meet at the actual site of the farm show.

Trading Post

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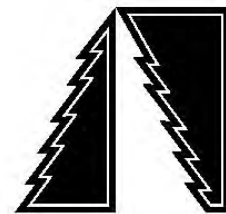


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