

Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

June 2017

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Summer Meeting: Meadow Ridge Farm

The Summer meeting of the NHVTCTA will be held on Saturday, June 24, at Meadow Ridge Farm in Middlesex, Vt. (just outside of Montpelier). The hosts are Patrick, Tami, and Aidan White.

Following the morning business meeting, there will be a membership group discussion on two topics:

- A. Fall vs. Spring Planting
- B. Sharpening Knives

It's a chance for everyone to share what works for them and what doesn't. If you have a special shearing knife sharpening tool, please bring it along for show-and-tell.

This will be followed by a presentation from Joshua Faulkner, UVM Farm and Climate Change Coordinator, on farm drainage. It will look at how water moves, the installation and construction of different drainage systems, and an overview of regulatory issues

relating to installing drainage on the farm.

After a chicken barbecue lunch, Ron Kelley, retired Vermont Forest Insect and Disease Specialist, will discuss Integrated Pest Management (IPM), with an emphasis on setting thresholds for economic damage, to help determine when spraying is really necessary, as well as the role of beneficial insects.

That will be followed by a field session led by Ron Kelley and Patrick White to look at various insect and disease problems, and what happens (good and bad) on a farm that does not use insecticides.

Registration for the meeting (without a guaranteed meal) is available on-site if you have not already sent in your registration form.

Contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-0660 with questions or for more information.

Tree Safety Tips

The National Fire Protection Association has a tip sheet with guidelines for Christmas tree safety. The guide covers topics such as choosing a fresh tree, proper placement of the tree (at least three feet from any heat source and not blocking exits), watering frequency and infor-

mation about which lights to use. It can be printed out for distribution to tree customers who may have questions. The tip sheet can be downloaded at: <http://www.nfpa.org/~media/files/public-education/resources/safety-tip-sheets/christmastree-safetytips.pdf?la=en>

President's Message

Hi all,
Last year's spring work went so well because everything dried up nicely and early. Then the dry weather became a problem because it wouldn't stop. Well, we had to pay for that this spring with some fields that haven't dried up since the snow melted.

I planted 5,000 trees by hand this year because we couldn't put a tractor in the field until recently. As a group, farmers have to be ready for anything. If it's too wet for a prolonged period you may get a Rhizosphaera needle blight problem and if it's too dry for too long you may get a spruce spider mite infestation. Both

have happened to me in recent years and there is nothing I can do but react to it as it unfolds according to the weather.

Patrick and Tami White are hosting our Summer meeting this year on June 24 in Middlesex, Vt., and there will be a presentation on drainage; both how to help address drainage problems from an engineering standpoint and also a look at what you're allowed to do on your farm. This involves state laws and federal wetlands regulations. In Washington, D.C., the Federal Regulatory Accountability Act of 2017 (S.951) has already passed in the House and is on it's way to the Senate. I would encourage

all of you to contact the senators from your state and urge them to vote for S.951. This common sense legislation is designed to reign in federal agencies that are trying to create their own agendas instead of following the guidelines set forth by Congress. Government overreach has become a problem with many federal agencies and it's time to stop them. Some rules and regulations are necessary to hold everyone accountable, so lets keep the federal government accountable too.

See you all at the meeting.

*Daniel Beloin,
President*



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



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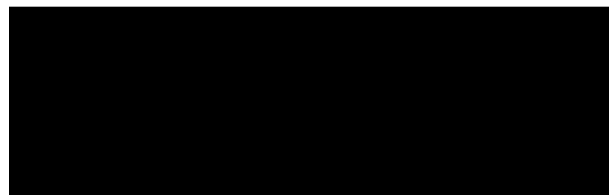
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Copies of the Association bylaws and policies are available to members at any time by contacting the Executive Secretary.



NHVTCTA News Roundup

Honorary Life Member

At the Winter meeting, the NHVTCTA membership voted unanimously to make Charlotte Wright of Keene, N.H., an honorary life member. Charlotte is 97 years old and still operating her Christmas tree farm, with the help of family, after the passing of her husband.

In presenting the membership to Charlotte, NHVTCTA executive secretary Jim Horst noted that, "Few people of your age, for that matter even much younger, would have the interest, will and determination to continue with such a project."

A Retirement Note

The Association received a nice note earlier this year from long-

time member Max Paine in Stowe, Vermont:

Dear Members:

It been a joy being a member with you for over 50 years. Thank for all the help and the expertise that the Association has given me in the past years. But my time has come to step down. As my heath is failing me, it's time to pass on to retirement. My property is up for sale. My brother Tom has taken over the business and his sons will take over the business when he retires.

Thanks again,
Max Paine

Director Candidates

Anyone interested in serving as

a director of the NHVTCTA should contact Dan Beloin before the end of July.

Meeting Sites (and Ideas)

The Association is always on the lookout for new meeting sites. The only requirement is a willingness and sufficient parking space.

We're also open to new topics to cover at meetings. If there's something about growing Christmas trees that you'd like to learn more about, chances are others would like to learn more too, so let us know what subjects you'd like to see at meetings. If you're willing to host a Summer or Fall meeting, or you have a topic idea, contact Patrick White, pwhitevt@aol.com



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Christmas Tree Promotion Board Update

Promotion Board Campaign Highlights

Following on the heels of its first, fully-funded promotional campaign, the Christmas Tree Promotion Board (christmastreepromotionboard.org) shared a campaign summary video with hundreds of Christmas tree producers across the country.

“The video is a highlights reel of sorts; sharing the fun, heartwarming and creative activations from the 2016 promotional campaign,” notes CTPB Executive Director, Tim O’Connor. “The video provides growers the opportunity to see what they likely missed during the busy harvest and selling season.”

The video was presented at more than 20 state, regional and provincial meetings (including the NHVTCTA Winter Meeting) between January and March, reaching growers in more than 22 states and Canadian provinces. Each time the video was shared, CTPB staff members participated in a question and answer session to provide more details and to insure growers had accurate information about the campaign.

These sessions were also an opportunity to hear grower feedback on the campaign and what they would like to see as the campaign moves forward.

What’s New for 2017

The primary focus of the recent two-day meeting of the Promotion Board was to review the 2016 campaign and to determine how to move forward in 2017. Concept Farm, CTPB’s ad agency, presented detailed results on consumer reach for each



of the activations that were a part of the 2016 campaign. Board members learned how each activation was executed, it’s related costs and the measurable reach for each event.

A part of the campaign budget was pre and post-campaign consumer research. The research was enlightening and provided tremendous guidance on potential customers, their motivations and tendencies, as well as their propensity to purchase real or artificial Christmas trees. Most importantly, the research provided insight into messaging that would appeal to our target audience and where to reach our target customers.

Based on the results of the 2016 campaign, the Promotion Board chose to adopt a campaign plan for 2017 that includes the following:

- The CTPB management team will create and manage the 2017 campaign strategy and secure contracts with both the ad agency and public relations firm.
- Engage Concept Farm once again as the ad agency for the campaign and keep the “It’s Christmas. Keep it Real!” tagline.
- Select a new public relations firm, to join the CTPB campaign

team to maximize the reach of our consumer messages.

- Increase grower involvement in the campaign by providing easier and earlier access to campaign assets.
- Increase grower outreach; training growers how to use the campaign by providing social media training in person and online, and expand grower-direct communications efforts.
- Engage CTPB management team member, Marsha Gray, for additional hours and focus efforts on grower engagement and communications. To create that available time, Gray is resigning her position as the executive director of the Michigan Christmas Tree Association.

Rockis Elected

Chair of Promotion Board

At the Christmas Tree Promotion Board’s recent meeting, Jim Rockis was elected to serve as the Chairman of the board for the next year. Rockis, a seedling producer and Christmas tree grower from West Virginia, was originally named to the board in January of 2015 and was recently re-appointed by former Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack. Rockis succeeds Betty Malone of Oregon in this position where she served for two years.

Joining Rockis as officers of the Promotion Board are Rex Korson of Korson’s Tree Farms in Sidney, Michigan as Vice Chairman; Paul Battaglia of Battaglia Ranch Christmas Tree Farm in San Martin, California as Treasurer and Beth Walterscheidt of Evergreen Farms in Elgin, Texas as Secretary.

Thoughts on Feeding Trees

Thanks to Bob White for sharing these thoughts and observations on both old and new approaches to fertilization.

There likely are as many ways to feed Christmas trees as there are growers. In short, there is no single way to fertilize, some maybe better than others, but most can be helpful.

Nitrogen / Kmag / gypsum, boron are in most mixes annually, sometimes phosphorus, potassium and zinc when needed. One recent development: Boron is now available sprayed on fertilizer pellets for better coverage.

One basic challenge that has remained the same is that most of us struggle to get phosphorus

and iron into the tree, while we have large amounts unavailable on or in the ground. Just because we have good soil test results, that may have little to do with what the tree can take in. There is a lot of balancing that takes place in the soil by Mother Nature, we just get to help her a little.

Typically, the first rotation of trees is easier to grow than all following rotations—something most of us longer-time growers learned years ago.

In general, the trees that growers are producing have improved a whole lot over the last 10 years or so; it is now rare to see trees heavily stressed from a lack of food any more.

Many of us use Spectrum Analytic for our testing. The lab does a really good job at letting us know what to add to adjust soils, however I have often found the recommended dose should be split into multiple applications and.

One thing that is changing is a broad understanding that pH in our region can and likely should be run lower than the existing recommended range of 5 to 5.5 for Fraser fir. In my light soil fields, 4.9 grows my best trees; when I get up in the 5.5 range I can see a significant reduction in quality, about 6 and they get pretty unhealthy. I have grown in 3.8 pH, though I think this

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Thoughts on Feeding Trees

Continued from page 5

might be lower than we want to target.

Dr. Rich Cowles spoke to us at the NHVTCTA meeting last summer about his ongoing field trials involving lowering pH. Larry Downey and I got to visit the field site with him last fall near the end of the long drought—it was impressive with multiple rows of sick/dead trees mixed with multiple rows of thriving trees running across a gentle grade, in somewhat heavier soil on an old dairy farm. The pH was considerably higher than Fraser can tolerate, which accounted for the sick trees, it's likely the root rot was just finishing off the weakened trees. The tree rows with the lower pH where growing well and had no sign of sickness or death from root rot that we could see. These were trees about 3 feet tall.

A bunch of things happen as pH is lowered, and it is not yet well understood what factors can help and what can hurt us over time. Often we see very high sulfur levels, which may or may not be an important factor.

I believe Rich had used sulfur and ammonium sulfate to lower pH for his research.

Other efforts in our area have been ongoing for a few years with very impressive results using ammonia sulfate (which lowers pH rapidly as it reacts in the soil) as a nitrogen source, most notably moist areas in the field that struggled don't seem to struggle any more. The greenery gets softer and fuller, much like the native areas in the south, where I don't believe urea is as commonly used as it is here (where it is cheap and readily available).

The rates and costs needed with ammonia sulfate might scare some, it's not cheap and likely will take multiple passes annually. Urea has 46 percent nitrogen, I often use about 200 pounds per acre per year split application, and never see foliar tests indicate that I have too much N. Ammonia sulfate only has 21 percent N; because both urea and nitrogen sulfate currently cost about the same per ton, it can be two times or more as expensive. Plus there are

many unknowns with ammonia sulfate at this time: What is the correct rate? How often and when to spread it? Will it be helpful for every site over time? Will it be harmful in some soils or application methods?

It may or may not remain good advice to continue applying about the same amount of lime as N on an ounce-of-N-to-an-ounce of dolomitic lime basis to keep pH stable once a target pH is reached. We all will continue to want a high amount of calcium and good amount of magnesium annually anyway but this may impact a chemical process in the ground that we do not understand. I saw no issues when using lime with urea. I will keep adding low doses of lime once all my pH ranges are under 5.

I would strongly recommend never over-applying lime on existing growing trees as is commonly called for in soil recommendations, the results can be a very unhappy tree grower.

Bill Tester recently shared his experiences using feed-grade urea, and that he was impressed with the results. I struggled with why this might make a difference, over fertilizer-grade urea. It may be chemically different or it may just spread on the soil surface better and not get stuck in the trees and weeds, allowing it to be more available to more roots. Either way, Bill felt it was a good investment; it does cost a little more and maybe harder to get, so it might be helpful to ask for it ahead of time if you want to try it. I'm not sure if the finer pellets will work in all blends with different spreaders.

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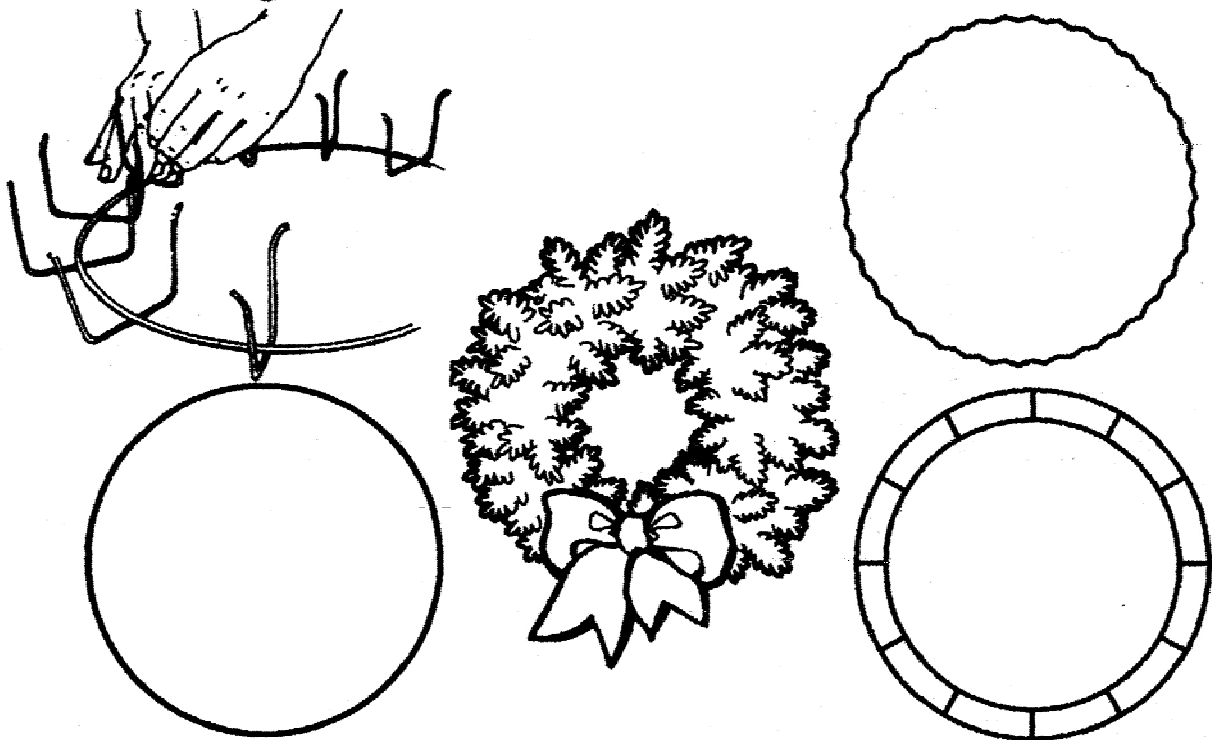
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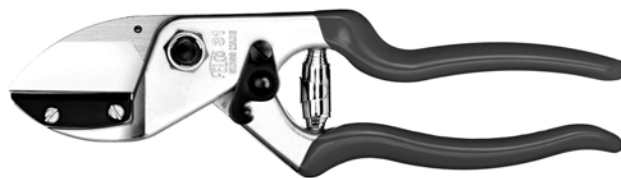
Tool Time: Hand Pruners

It's almost that time of year again—shearing season. And while there are many different tools used for shearing, it's a safe bet that everyone carries a set of pruners with them in the field. We asked a couple of members (who have switched to using mainly anvil pruners) about what they use and why.

I've been using hand-held pruners for 50 years and all hand-held pruners work well if you *only* use them while shearing Christmas trees. You are usually only snipping small tips of the current year's growth with ease. When you get into larger branches (woody material), however, a sturdy pair of anvil pruners is the only way to go.

Bypass pruners tend to twist when cutting larger limbs and pitch buildup makes them stick shut. You have to clean and lubricate them often to keep them working. The anvil pruners can cut limbs as large as 1.5 inches in diameter all day long without sticking shut and can cut the small limbs also.

There are many brands of pruners....Snap-Cut (by Gil-mour), Wallace, and many others that you can buy for \$15 to \$20 and they all work well enough for a while. If you believe that you get what you pay for, you should use the Felco 31 anvil pruner. Pricy at \$50 or more, but they will consistently



Felco 31 Anvil Pruners

outlast two or three pairs of any other pruner I've used. It's the one pruner you can use for everything.

Making wreaths requires a lot of small branch snipping and you may want a pair of needle-nose pruners for that.

—Dan Beloin

We used bypass pruners for many years, thinking they did a better job on the new growth. I guess we started using them because everyone else liked them years ago and had

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Tool Time: Hand Pruners (continued)

never tried anvil pruners. I still carry bypass pruners on the tractors because we have a bunch; when we lose them, we don't look for them.

For bypass, we mostly used Felco, they did not gum up badly and could cut through larger branches if needed, but hands would fatigue. We also used ARS: really good steel never goes dull, but they stick together very badly and the lock opens up constantly, which can lead to nasty cuts. We used many cheap pruners for workers, they usually did not hold up to long, but often were lost before they had a chance to fall apart.

We have now switched to anvil pruners, and our pruner of choice has become the Lowe



Lowe 5.127 Anvil Pruners

5.127 Anvil (about \$40). You can run it for days without cleaning, has not got dull yet, it's real easy on your hand, is balanced well and is very safe. When someone loses these, they find them, because they do not want go back to using an old bypass.

The one type of bypass pruners we still buy are the ones that my wife uses, Barnel B7. They are the worst pruners we have ever tried but they fit her

hands so she keeps using them. They are famous for making the best blood-blister pinches on the hands of everyone who uses them, but they do cut well.

For tops we use the ARS 4-foot, fixed bypass pruner; they are very light and well built, it is easy to be accurate with them, they have stood the test of time—when you have to hold something over your head all day long day after day this is the right tool. We have the 6-foot fixed ARS if needed but they are only used for the few trees we can not reach with the 4-foot, or after our necks gets to sore from looking up.

—Bob White

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One Big Baler

We don't normally cover news from the other side of the pond, but this is interesting nonetheless. Several news stories have documented what is believed to be the world's largest tree baler. It was custom-built by Howey in Michigan for Woods Farm, a 600-acre Christmas tree farm in England.

The Gilbert brothers, who own the farm, which sells about 200,000 trees a year, say it was needed to help fill the growing number of orders for 40-foot and taller trees.

According to the *Birmingham Mail* newspaper:

The spruce and larch leviathans, some over 60 foot tall, pose logistical problems – one of the main ones being wrapping the towering trees.

The Gilbert brothers have come



up with a record-breaking solution. They have purchased the world's biggest Christmas tree wrapper, capable of encasing 80-foot conifers in protective mesh. Geoff and Graham paid \$500,000 to have the monster

custom-made by Michigan firm Howey Baler Corp. Graham laughs: "I think it's one in the eye for the Americans, asking them to make something for us that's bigger than anything they've got over there."



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