

Julie Eckart

Instructor's Name

ENGL 1013

Date

Growing a Tradition

The Christmas tree is an American symbol that brings a smile to all. The tree is decorated and towers over many wrapped presents for eager children on Christmas morning. However, this tradition is not only a symbol for many Americans, but it is also a source of labor and income. Cone-shaped Christmas trees are grown on large farms for five, six, or even ten years by the farmer, all the while being prepared for that one special holiday.

To begin producing “the perfect Christmas tree,” you need a quality seedling genetically selected from a seed source with good Christmas tree characteristics. These seedlings are specifically chosen to grow a good tree and are planted during the fall, winter, or early spring. The seedlings are usually planted between five and six feet apart.

Insects are a predator to the Christmas tree, and if they get out of hand, they can cause the tree to die. Therefore, during every summer month, or about three times a year, you spray insecticide. The insecticide is sprayed to target the Nantucket pinetip moth, which only attacks the Virginia pine trees. The Nantucket pinetip moth lays eggs on the growing shoots of the pine trees, and when hatched, the larvae bury into the shoots and eat into the tree, causing it to lose its cone-like shape that most people prefer.

Insects are not the only death-causing element for the trees. You also need to keep a close eye to make sure the trees do not get fungal infections, rust, and aphides during the spring. If these infections are detected, then you need to spray with a fungicide. During the first year, you need to keep the grass killed around the tree, using herbicides such as Round-up so the

bottom of the tree can fill out. However, the farmer has to be careful not to spray the Round-up on the green tree, or it will die.

Throughout the first calendar year, the tree is not trimmed or cut in any way. Nevertheless, the second year of growth starts the long process of trimming the trees, which must be repeated either once or twice a year. To trim the tree, you first cut the leader, or the top of the tree, to make a nice top on the tree. The laterals, or side branches, are then cut. When the laterals are cut, each branch that was cut grows into three or four branches, causing the tree to become thicker and fuller. When doing the first shearing, you must make a handle on the tree. You do this by removing all the branches from the ground up to about eight inches on the trunk. This allows the customers, when purchasing the tree, to have a part of the tree to put in the stand without having to cut off any branches. The Christmas trees are trimmed, or sheared, once during the second year, in the summer, and in the years to follow in the spring and summer.

For the next three to seven years, depending on when the tree is sold, the process of spraying, trimming, and mowing has to be repeated every year. Right before the Christmas holidays, the trees big enough to be sold get a natural green pigment, which is nontoxic, sprayed on them. This keeps the needles moist and makes them a little greener, since the Virginia pine trees get a little more yellow during the cold months.

Through personal experience, I realize the hard work that must be done in the sweltering summer weather and in the sleet and snow to deliver these perfect trees to America. The pride, sweat, and love of the farmers and their families go into these cone-shaped trees everyone adores. Finally, the process of growing a Christmas tree is completed when a family purchases and decorates the American symbol with as much pride and joy as the grower had in getting the tree ready for sale.