

Grading

The grading of Christmas trees may be thought of as a system of communication between the grower or seller and the retailer.

As with any other product in the marketplace, it is important that buyer and seller understand what they are dealing with regarding the standards of the product, or what they are supposed to be.

Christmas trees, of course, are not manufactured gadgets that all look exactly alike.

A good deal of common sense and a fair-minded approach are critical when grading. Since all grading is based on a visual assessment and the judgment of the grader, most systems of grading allow a margin for error usually between 5 and 10 percent. There are many systems of grading trees, but they are all aimed at describing characteristics such as density, taper, defects and sometimes color, butt length, and size. The better the understanding between buyer and seller of what is expected from any grading system, the better their relationship will be when it comes to paying for the trees.

Most grading systems for balsam fir are based on two key factors: Density & Symmetry.




Density refers to the abundance of needles and is influenced largely by the number of branches. This is sometimes described in terms of amount of stem coverage. Most trees require shearing to produce heavy foliage. Trees with the heaviest density receive four or five shearing's. Classifications of density are usually heavy, medium, or light. Symmetry is a measure of the evenness, taper, and balance of the tree.

Nova Scotia has moved to adopt the United States Department of Agriculture Christmas Tree Grade. This allows for standardization of Nova Scotia Christmas trees and better communication throughout the industry.

Training courses are provided for those wishing to be employed as graders and for growers who wish to increase their knowledge base in their Christmas tree lots and in the marketplace.

For more information, refer to the Certification in Christmas Tree Grading Course available at: <https://ctcns.com/courses/grading/>.

USDA Grade System Definition Chart

		
USDA Premium	USDA Number 1	USDA Number 2
Characteristics typical of the species		
Butt trimmed; except for trees graded "on the stump"		
Normal taper		
Fresh		
Clean	Fairly clean	
Healthy		
Well shaped		
Not less than heavy density	Not less than medium density	Not less than light density
Handle length not less than 6 ", or more than 1-1/2" for each foot of tree length (unless graded "on the stump")		
3 faces; 1 minor defect	3 faces; 2 minor defects	
Remaining face may not have more than 1 noticeable defect		

USDA Grade System Comparison Chart

			
	BEST	BETTER	GOOD
USDA	Premium	1	2
NS GREEN	Top Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade
LCCTPA	1	2	3
NECTA	Select-best / Premium- high end fancy and low end select	1-high choice and low fancy	Selected Natural
NS	Select	Fancy	Choice

Original content contributed in 2021 by:

Lloyd Mackinnon, St. Andrews Antigonish County, Nova Scotia B0H 1X0

Scott MacEwan, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (now Department of Lands and Forestry)

Extension Specialist (Christmas Trees)

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