



TREEmendous News



Florida Christmas Tree Association's Newsletter

October 2020

Linda Songer, Editor

HOW WILL COVID-19 AFFECT YOUR TREE SALES?

Dear members,

As we have all been forced to change how we interact with others this year, it is inevitable that we must consider how our tree sales practices must change as we welcome customers to our farms. It is a difficult and challenging time for all businesses and we are no exception.

The National Christmas Tree Association has published a Best Practices Recommendations for Choose and Cut Farms with very helpful suggestions for the protection of our customers and employees during these unprecedented times. A copy of this is on page 3 of this newsletter. Hopefully this will help you as you prepare for this year's tree sales.

This has been a most difficult year for scheduling and holding Spring or Fall Meetings. Not only have Florida and Georgia cancelled meetings, due to the coronavirus pandemic, so have most of the other State Associations in our Country. Even the Sun Belt Expo in Moultrie was cancelled.

Tim Mitchell Yule Stand Company and Tommy Wagoner's company Fraser Knoll, located in NC, delivered many of our supplies including netting, stands, and misc. to the Florida or Georgia Fall Meetings in the past. Since we have been unable to meet this year this has placed an added difficulty in preparing for this year's sales.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS NEED YOUR HELP

We have some outstanding Board Members, Officers, and their Spouses who have guided the FCTA. Many of us are getting older and we need some new Directors and Officers to continue into the future. Please send me an email to songerma@hotmail.com or a letter providing your opinions on the following:

- (1) Would you like to have a meeting at your farm?
- (2) Would you like to become a Board Member or Officer sometime in the next two years?
- (3) We have been providing each member with a ChristmasTree Magazine. That publication is going out of business. Should we try to replace this Magazine?
- (4) What type of articles would you like in this TreeMendous News?
- (5) Would you write an article for the TreeMendous News? Your experience can be very valuable to other members.
- (6) What would you like to see at a Spring or Fall Meeting?

Michael Songer, Past President

Florida Christmas Tree Association Officers and Board

Acting President Michael Songer

Past President

Michael Songer
443 Cody Drive
Orange Park, FL 32073
904-535-7822
songerma@hotmail.com

Vice President.....Mark Powell
7593 Old Spanish Trail
Sneads, FL 32460
850-593-5199
POWELL147@embarqmail.com

DIRECTORS:

...Cathie Gregory
3605 NW 69th Street
Gainesville, FL 32606
352-373-4575
unicornhill@yahoo.com

Secretary Sue Kossuth
20926 NW 75th Avenue
Alachua, FL 32615
386-462-2060

... .. Bob Neilson
6780 SE 67th Ct.
Trenton, FL 32693
352-472-2340
gatorjoyce@aol.com

TreasurerJohn Gregory
3605 NW 69th Street
Gainesville, FL 32606
352-373-4575
unicornhill@yahoo.com

..... Mike Kelly
1603 Penton Rd.
Milton, FL 32570
850-449-4316
schnoorjp@AOL.com



FCTA Meeting

Unfortunately, the FCTA has been unable to hold a meeting due to the pandemic this year. The Board of Directors sincerely hope that 2021 will allow us to again get together to share experiences, get new information, and renew friendships. We need to have a host farm for our next FCTA meeting. If you would be willing to host a meeting please contact any of the Officers or Directors. It's a great opportunity for you to show off your farm and get much helpful advice from the vast experience of other members. Also, if you know of a Christmas Tree farmer who does not belong to FCTA, please encourage them to become a member.



NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE ASSOCIATION

Choose & Cut Farm COVID-19

BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Christmas Tree Association has developed these best practice recommendations for Choose & Cut farms to use as guidance to adapt their business to the circumstances they will face during the 2020 Christmas season due to COVID-19.

Choose & Cut farms must protect the health and safety of their employees, provide customers with the confidence they need so they can enjoy selecting a tree without risk and demonstrate to state and local officials they are conducting business responsibly. We highly encourage you to develop the best possible response to these recommendations:

DEVELOP A COVID-19 PLAN

- Frequently sanitize items and areas such as hand saws, tree cart handles, counter tops, door handles and restrooms
- Limit the number of customers permitted inside buildings, minimize or eliminate wagon rides, fire pits, or other places that people gather
- Supply no touch garbage receptacles
- Offer Santa either on closed circuit TV or live at a distance
- Do not erect photo op "cut-outs" where faces come in contact
- Offer individually bagged food items instead of self-serve loose items such as cookies
- Provide a server for drinks instead of offering self-serve
- Require all dogs to be on a leash, or discourage dogs, as they cause unnecessary interaction among customers
- Encourage customers to tie their own trees on their vehicles by offering an instructional video

SALES & PAYMENT

- Install windows or plexiglass partitions at sales counters
- Offer Curbside pick-up
- Use a touchless pay credit card system
- Price products to limit the use of coins
- Eliminate the need for customer signatures on credit card transactions

PROTECTING CUSTOMERS

- Take staff temperature daily, provide PPE for all employees, do not permit staff exhibiting symptoms of illness to come to work
- Encourage customers to visit during non-peak hours

- Create special hours for select customers (elderly and at risk)
- Advise customers that you reserve the right to deny service to anyone displaying signs of illness or not following farm guidelines
- Have sanitizing stations available to staff and customers
- Request masks be worn by those able to without adverse health impacts
- Require masks be worn when social distancing is not possible, as on wagon rides to fields or in checkout lines
- Offer masks or neck gaiters for sale (with farm name or logo)

COMMUNICATIONS

- Discuss procedures with staff to keep employees safe
- Train staff on new procedures to keep customers safe
- Communicate early the proactive steps your farm is taking to keep customers safe through website, newsletter, social media, phone message, local paper, etc.
- Recommend signs at farm: wear mask inside buildings, limited numbers in gift shop (follow your state/county regulations), maintain social distancing, manage customer flow (one-way traffic in and out)
- Stress no visitors to farm if ill or had contact with someone ill with COVID-19
- Consider sign in sheet with family name and phone number. Break into morning/afternoon each day

RESOURCES

- Additional information is available on CDC, State and Local Health Department websites
- **There is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted on plants or plant products** Source: Cornell Cooperative Extension/New York State Integrated Pest Management



PO Box 3609 • Littleton, CO 80161 • Phone 800-975-5920
www.realchristmastrees.org • info@realchristmastrees.org

FCTA NEEDS YOU!

By Michael Songer, Past President

In 2018 I was hospitalized during the Selling Season due to AFib, a heart rhythm problem. I have been a member of FCTA since the beginning and the President for at least ten years. Jodi Utsman assumed the Presidency of the FCTA but her Farm has become a full-time agricultural attraction that hires several employees. The phone calls and duties of the FCTA were taking many more hours than she had expected and she has resigned.

The calls from the FCTA Website are interesting but very time consuming. A young man from Miami phoned me last week and wanted to drive up to Middleburg, FL, and pick up 100 Frasier Firs to be sold in Miami. I explained we didn't grow Frasier Firs in Florida, but that they came from the Carolinas. In June or July I would have referred him to a Northern Grower, but this year trees are in short supply and they want full payment in advance. I could tell he had no experience, no capital, but he wanted to get Rich Fast.

The more normal call is from a family that wants a Christmas Tree. We determine their location and refer them to one or two farms in their area.

The most enjoyable call is when we get a new prospective member. I normally invite them to visit my farm or a farm in their area or to send me an email with more information. I refer them to the Website to see our past publications of the TreeMendous News.

The point is that these calls, although enjoyable, can consume a large amount of time. Thus, I understand Jodi's reasons for resigning. However, her resignation has left our organization without a President. I have temporarily stepped back into the role, but I am unable to continue longterm. We need a member to volunteer to fill the vacancy (YOU??). I will be glad to work with the new President as he/she assumes the office.

Aucker's Nursery

LEYLAND CYPRESS LINERS



2 1/2" X 3 1/2" Super Plugs 85¢ ea.
2,500 and up 80¢ ea.
10,000 and up 75¢ ea.

7 GALLON 4'- 5' \$ 20.00 each

15 GALLON 6'- 7' \$ 35.00 each

25 GALLON 8'- 10' \$ 80.00 each

Fed Ex & Motor Freight Shipping Available

13150 NE 38th Place • Williston, FL 32696

(352) 528-3889

www.auckersnursery.com

VENDOR ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PEAK SEASONS HAS ACQUIRED THE TIM MITCHELL'S YULE TREE STAND COMPANY

Tim Mitchell's Yule Tree Stand Company has been manufacturing exceptional rebar stands and water bowls for over 50 years. The Mitchell family has earned a reputation of producing a quality product at a fair price and timely delivery.

These values are also Peak Seasons values. It's one of the main reasons why we've purchased the Tim Mitchell's Yule Tree Stand Company. We welcome all the Mitchell customers and are excited to offer Tim Mitchell Stands, along with the full line of Peak Seasons products to all our customers.

The PEAK SEASONS group (www.peakseasons.com) now includes Tim Mitchell and Veldsman & Sons (www.veldsman.com).

NOTE FROM MICHAEL SONGER: Tommy Wagoner has advised me that he has purchased some of the Inventory from one of the Tim Mitchell locations. He has a nice catalog, see www.fraserknoll.com. I have been to the Fraser Knoll store in Laurel Springs, NC. It is a nice store about 500 miles from Jacksonville. Remember to visit if you take a trip to the mountains.

Evans Christmas Products, Mobile, Al (www.evanschristmas.com) see advertisement, has a store about 400 miles due West off I-10.

I have my supplies for this year, but if some of you are interested I might make a trip for a joint order from Tommy Wagoner or Evans for 2021.



COTE COLOR CORPORATION -- I have an arrangement with Cote Color where they allow us a 10% discount, and give me a gas allowance for picking up the order at the factory in South Carolina. For example, the cost is \$57.25 for 2.5 gal container. The discount is \$5.72, thus your net is \$51.53. I use a 25 gal spray tank, a 12 volt pump, a battery, 75 foot of garden hose, and a hand spray gun. Each gal of Cote makes 30 gal of spray. Many of us used to use Greenzit and other brands which are good when fresh, but if you held any over to the next year, you had to shake it, strain it through a cloth, soak the globules, then strain it again. Cote was developed after the other brands and has an additive to prevent the globules.

I have a few 2.5 gal containers of Cote Color left, if you would like to give it a try.

None of the Colorants will make a brown tree Green. Depending on rainfall and any cold temperature many of our trees will experience some yellowing and slight brown at the tips. A Colorant will keep a GREEN TREE looking GREEN LONGER.

Everything But the Trees

For the Successful Christmas Tree Lot

Flock & Flock Machines | Rebar Stands | Wood Stands
| Lot Supplies | Netting | Tree Removal Bags | Retail Items |
Tree Colorant & Needlebond | Flame Retardant | Accessories
| Nail-on Water Bowls | Sales Control Tags | Bows & Ribbons |
Wreath Rings & Embellishments | Banners, Pendants & Signs

Welcome to the family!
Tim Mitchell's Yule Stand customers

PEAK Veldsma&sons
seasons
Your Christmas Tree Lot Supplier

www.peakseasons.com | 800.858.8733

YULE OR BICYCLE TRIMMER DEVELOPED AND MANUFACTURED BY SPENCER GRANT



Article on the next page about this unique trimmer

YULE OR BICYCLE TRIMMER DEVELOPED AND MANUFACTURED BY SPENCER GRANT

I think this was one of the best trimmer machines ever developed for Choose and Cut Operators. It was manufactured and sold by Spencer Grant who visited all of the Christmas Tree Association meetings in the South Georgia, Florida, Alabama and others, during the 1980's and 1990's. I'm attaching pictures of the early model.

THE PROBLEM IS THE PARTS ON THE OLD MACHINES ARE WEARING OUT, AND SPENCER HAS DIED. HOW MANY STILL HAVE THESE MACHINES AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR PARTS?????

The original engine was a 2.2 HP Honda Engine. I've replaced a couple of these when they were available, but they are no longer produced. On his Original Model with a pan under the engine I've installed a 3hp Honda Engine with good success. It has now been down rated to a 2.8hp, but it works well. It has more power, and fits on the original frame. (Cost about \$400.)

On his improved model the supporting braces fit more tightly around the engine, and I have not been able to make the 3hp engine fit (at least yet). I've found a 2.5hp engine from Harbor Freight, but if it is installed you would have to stand in front of the engine to start it, and that doesn't seem too safe. (Cost about \$110.) I think several of us may be having similar problems, and if you will email me we can collect data and keep these machines going. I have some good diagrams of the parts, but it doesn't show the sizes or sources.

I've replaced the tire with a hard tire from a bicycle shop for about \$60.. and I've replaced some of the smaller belts purchased locally.

On top of the 6' rack of cutters I have two , two foot extensions for a total of 10'. Recently after 20 + years I broke a belt on one of the 2' extensions. The belt is a double sided with the cord in the middle and measures 68 inches on the inside. It is cut every inch on both sides. I took the belt to all the stores and no one had any idea about it. I phoned the son of Spencer Grant and this is what they did. They took a double sided belt and cut the groves in both sides, but not through the cords, to increase flexibility.

Now I have two cords that I'm ready to practice on. If any of you have done this please respond to your success. I would appreciate if you will let me know if you have a machine and your success in keeping it running. I've also tried a softer rubber belt that worked on a hot day, but not so successful on a cold day.

Michael A Songer, Past President Florida Christmas Tree Association

songerma@hotmail.com



Shearing Equipment



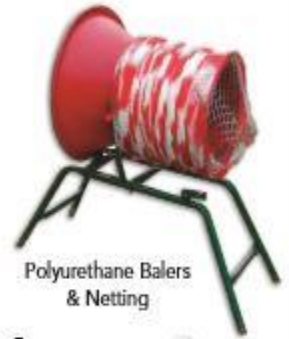
Clamp-Type Wreath Frames & Machines



Shakers & Other Equipment



Stands - Cinco, Yule Tree, Gunnard and More



Polyurethane Balers & Netting

WAGNER'S fraserknoll

SUPPLIES + EQUIPMENT



Colorants

We select and offer the best-working products!

BALERS • NETTING • WREATH-MAKING SUPPLIES • SHAKERS • TREE STANDS
TAGS • COLORANTS • BANNERS • SHEARING MACHINES • REMOVAL BAGS & MORE

As an experienced grower and retailer, we can help you select products for a more productive and profitable business.

1-877-352-7355 • www.fraserknoll.com

384 BURNT HILL ROAD • LAUREL SPRINGS, NC 28644 • PHONE/FAX: 336-982-3517



Kelco INDUSTRIES

MILBRIDGE MAINE, 04658

Your Complete Source For Christmas

Tree And Wreath Supplies

www.kelcomaine.com

800-343-4057

SEEDLINGS ALERT 2020

Superior Nursery at Lee, Florida. Phone 850-971-5159 They have increased the cost of bare root Southern Red Cedar to (\$280..per thousand). They have Sand Pine and Virginia Pine seedlings (\$120. per thousand.) and Spruce Pine (\$140. Per thousand) available for the Fall Season. One gallon cedars are \$3.35 each.

Dwight Stansel Farm & Nursery, 5553 164th St, Wellborn, FL 32094, Phone 386-963-2827, e-mail [dsfntte@windstream.net] raises bare root Southern Red Cedar which they sell for \$250. per thousand. BUT, due to small crop they may not have ANY available for 2020.

The Division of Forestry--Andrews Nursery, Chiefland, FL, Phone 352-493-6096, will have bare root Sand Pine at \$60. per thousand. However, the number may be limited.

Aucker's Nursery, Williston, FL, phone 352-528-3889, has very nice Leland Cypress liners. See the Web Site: www.auckersnursery.com for current prices, and detailed instructions on planting, fertilizing, and trimming Leland Cypress.

BK Cedars (Susan Kossuth), Alachua, FL Phone 386-462-2060 or 352-474-1885 has a good supply of three gallon genetically improved Southern Red Cedar ('Robin Blue') suitable for initial or replacement planting (\$6.). They also have some 7 gal sizes of Red Cedar \$20, 15 gal \$35, and 30 gal 7 to 8 ft tall for \$75. She also has some 7, 15, and 30 gal Carolina Sapphire. I get a few of these to sell to customers who are thinking of digging a small tree. It is easier than digging, and I plant whatever is left over. Michael

Byron Lakeview Nursery, 2149 Lakeview Rd, Byron, GA 31008 has Carolina Sapphires in 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " pots for \$1.25, Blue Ice for \$1.35 and others. See Website (Minimum is 100.) (10% More if less than 500) www.byronlakeviewnursery.com

EVANS
CHRISTMAS PRODUCTS

a division of Evans & Company Inc.

7930 Zeigler Blvd

Mobile, Al 36608

800-832-4521

251-633-6840 fax

www.evanschristmas.com

The Easy-Lift Harness



Specifically designed for lifting the weight of heavy extended power pole pruners that previously made tree trimming a strenuous and back breaking task.

Keep the traditions alive!



Providing quality products at competitive prices with fast delivery and southern hospitality! Colorant, pruners, saws, netting, balers, tree stands, preservative, tree tags and banners, wreath supplies, bamboo, tree stakes, flock and flock equipment. Beneke trimmers, chemicals, Call for free catalog.



WWW.KIRKCOMPANY.COM | 800-252-KIRK | SALES@KIRKCOMPANY.COM

Specially Formulated Colorant Kolors by Kirk

Make Your Season Merry & Bright



T. Jay Rolland from Kirk Company Demonstrated their Kolors



Beginning the color application on a Leyland Cypress

Putting the finishing touches on the purple tree



They offer Kolors in Gold, Lt. Blue, Lt. Pink, Red, Black, Bright Pink, Dark Blue, Purple, White, Turquoise and more!

Tree Layout and Other Hints for New (and sometimes Old) Growers

Many of the new Christmas Tree Growers ask about Christmas Tree Layout. I tell them to lay them out next to a local highway with great visibility, easy access, and parking. This would be great, but with the Internet websites people will follow you anywhere.

What we are normally talking is spacing, 6 x 6, 7 x 7 or 8 x 8. Some of the early growers had limited space, small equipment, grew primarily Southern Red Cedar and used 6 x 6 spacing. With the addition of Virginia Pine, Sand Pine, and Leland Cypress most changed to 7 x 7 because the trees are wider.

I use a 5 foot Zero turn Gravely and a John Deere 750 tractor that fit between the 7 x 7 (approximately 960 trees per acre). I plant about one acre plot next to each other so I can mow three or four plots north to south without turning around. Then two or three weeks later I mow the same plots east to west.

We use dibbles and a 700 foot cord that is marked every 7 feet. We use a young boy on each end of the cord. This normally works well, except when one boy plants on the west side of the cord and the other plants on the east side. This can result on rows that are sometimes 6.5 foot and sometimes 7.5 feet. Yes, we make some mistakes. The more accurate in planting the easier to mow later, without cutting trees.

Some have used a 8 x 8 spacing. Depends on what fits your equipment. This is less trees per acre.

On a field of **Sand Pine** we harvest a few trees in the third year after planting, and more the 4th and 5th year. After the first planting, we go back in 6 months and again at 12 months and replant the trees that have died.

Southern Red Cedars are the traditional Florida Christmas Tree. They grow slower and normally are not as professional looking, but we sell many of them each year. They have a greater live ratio (90%) as compared to Sand Pine (60%). Some mature in 4 years and some take 10 years, but a high percentage of those planted will eventually sell.

In the late 1980's the **Virginia Pine** was going to be the tree of the future. I went out and planted three acres and the next year planted some more. We sold Virginia Pine for over 10 years. The problems started after three or four years. The VP have a problem with tip moth. In Georgia the problem was so bad they set up traps and developed spray programs. I think many of us in Florida escaped much of the problems because we had smaller fields. The VP have sturdy limbs and people liked them, but they were harder to trim. If we were to be in business for another 10 years, I would try VP again one acre at a time to add variety.

Leland Cypress makes a beautiful tree especially with irrigation. They are grown from cuttings and purchased in pots. I've had some and without irrigation they have not done the best on my property. After about three years many of them developed a fungus that can wipe out a crop. Some that raise them have spraying programs. Bradley Auckers is a specialists that sells cuttings. See his website www.auckersnursery.com

We have sold **Spruce Pine** for the last 8 years or more. It was one of my favorite. It has a live ratio better than Sand Pine, but looks like HECK the first two years. The third year it begins to shape up and makes a beautiful tree similar to Sand Pine.

Last year I had a plot of Spruce Pine that some of the trees started losing needles in November. The Spruce Pine in adjoining plots didn't seem to be affected. My thought was that planting may have been infected. My County Agent came out and took some samples and sent them to Gainesville. He reported I had **Needle Cast** and recommended that I spray them in the summer of 2020. In July I cut my knee badly with the Yule Trimmer and was not able to spray.

In October, 2020 the whole plot turned BROWN, and some of the surrounding plots have some damage. This is a loss of around 600 Spruce Pine trees. I've talked with another grower who is having a similar problem. I think this is a CUT AND BURN situation. Do you have any ideas??



OBSERVATIONS:

Linda trims trees with clippers and hedge trimmers and spends two to five minutes per tree. I use the Yule Trimmer and can trim 5 or 6 7-foot trees per minute. She does the better job.

In spraying Cote Color Preservative I use a spray gun, a twenty five gal tank, a DC motor and spray a tree a minute. Tony Harris uses a mist machine behind a tractor and sprays about twenty five trees per minute. Both do a good job, but Tony uses more spray.

I've made notes of several of my observations. I'm not always correct. If you have corrections or observations, please advise. songerma@hotmail.com

Michael

We have attached a form for 2021 dues. If you have not paid your 2020 dues and wish to remain on the FCTA website, please change the year to 2020 and mail to John Gregory.

Florida Christmas Tree Association 2021 Dues

Name _____ Spouse _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

email _____ website _____

Farm Name & Address _____

City _____ Farm Phone _____ County _____

Brief directions to the farm _____

Opening: date _____ days of week _____ hours _____ Choose & Cut Wholesale Retail Lot Potted Gift/Craft Shop Hay Rides Petting Zoo Wreaths other _____ Tree types: Virginia Pine Red Cedar Sand Pine Leyland Cypress Spruce Pine Carolina Sapphire Blue Ice Northern trees other _____

Acres in production _____ Acres planted this year _____

Member of National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) Yes _____ No _____

Associate Membership (retired; not selling trees) \$20 total enclosed _____

Membership dues \$75 total enclosed _____

FCTA cooperates with the NCTA in Trade Industry Partner (TIP). FCTA sends \$20 per member to NCTA to support the marketing efforts by the NCTA and Real Tree Advertising campaign. This means that you do not have to be a member of the NCTA in order for you to advertise your farm for free on the NCTA's website. (www.realchristmastrees.org). You must complete the NCTA form and mail it to them (address on website). FCTA also pays \$12 for a subscription to Christmas Tree Magazine.

mail to: John Gregory, Treasurer, FCTA 3605 NW 69th Street Gainesville, FL 32606

