

Home & Garden Toolbox

Holiday safety tips

- When hanging Christmas lights outdoors, reduce your risk of electric shock by using ladders made of nonconductive materials like wood or fiberglass-reinforced plastic.
- Before decorating, verify how many strands of lights are safe to connect end-to-end (as a general rule, it's three).
- Be careful not to overload extension cords. Know the wattage rating of your extension cord, as well as the power requirements of any lights or decorations you're plugging into it. A wattage rating is the amount of electricity an extension cord is built to carry. If the combined power requirements of lights and decorations exceeds that rating, overheating and fire can occur.
- Every so often, check Christmas light wires to make sure that they're not warm to the touch.
- Before taking a tree home, make sure its needles are fresh, green and firmly attached to branches. Bend needles between your fingers; if they break, the tree is too dry. The trunk's cut surface should be sticky. Pick the tree up vertically and tap the trunk against the ground; if needles fall off, move on to another tree.
- Christmas trees with thicker needles take longer to dry out, so a robust variety such as fir is a good choice.
- If you opt for an artificial tree, be sure it's flame-

retardant.

- Before putting your tree into its stand, cut a couple of inches off the bottom of the trunk to expose fresher, more absorbent wood.
- Your tree stand should have a capacity of at least one gallon, the amount of water a 6-foot Christmas tree can consume in a day's time. Live trees require about one quart of water for every inch of trunk diameter.
- Water live trees daily.
- Position tree a minimum of 3 feet away from candles, fireplaces, space heaters, radiators, heat vents and other heat sources.

Source: *Cableorganizer.com*

Best bets

REGISTER NOW: Hamilton County Master Gardener program, UT Extension, 6183 Adamson Circle. Learn about soils, trees, perennials, vegetables and pests. 6-9 p.m. Mondays, 9 a.m.-noon Tuesdays January through April. \$140 for tuition and notebook. 855-6113, tstebbins@utk.edu.

REGISTER NOW: Southeastern Flower Show trip, Atlanta. Visit this premier gardening and horticultural event with friends from Chattanooga. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Jan. 31. \$45 members, \$55 nonmembers, includes admission, Tennessee Aquarium escort and transportation. Register at www.tnaqua.org/Events/Events_travel.asp or 267-3474.

