Safety is a must when it comes to Christmas trees

The last bite of turkey, the leftover dressing and pecan pie have been eaten, so it’s time to deck the halls with holiday decorations. Get those tubs of family heirloom ornaments out of the closet, string the lights on the house and hang the stockings on the mantle – it’s Christmas time.

The Christmas tree is likely the shining star of holiday decorations. The tree’s branches are typically laden with ornaments handed down over the generations, cute things made from modeling clay when now-grown children were in grade school or even fun ornaments picked up on various trips over the years.

For those families who choose a live tree, there are a few things to keep in mind while shopping for the perfect one. Gently bend the needles of the tree to check for freshness. If they are pliable, the tree is pretty fresh. Another way to check for freshness is to lift the tree several inches off the ground and then drop it on the stump end. If an abundance of outer green needles falls off, the tree is not very fresh.

Some families have the tradition of traveling to the nearby tree farm to pick out the perfect tree each year. Others shop at the local nursery or plant store. No matter where you get your live tree, be sure to cut about an inch off the bottom of the trunk to create a fresh cut that will absorb water. A tree purchased at a tree farm will already have a fresh cut, so it will only require putting it in a bucket of water once you get home.

Next, find the perfect spot in your home that will showcase the beauty of the tree. Be sure to keep it at least 3 feet away from any heat source such as a fireplace, radiator, heat vents or candles. Also, avoid blocking any walkways or exits in the home.

Don’t let the stump dry out or you’ll have to make a fresh cut. A new tree will take up quite a bit of water the first few days so be sure to check the container or tree stand frequently and keep it full of water. Never let your tree get dry or it quickly becomes a hazard. Check the water level every day. The average Christmas tree can take in over a quart of water per day. A general rule of thumb is to provide one quart of water for each inch of the trunk’s diameter. Don’t worry – the tree can’t be overwatered.

Once the holidays are over, discard the tree in a timely matter as it will likely be quite dry by then. Dried-out trees are a fire danger and shouldn’t be left in the home or garage or placed outside against the home. Check with the local recycling center to see if old trees can be taken there.