

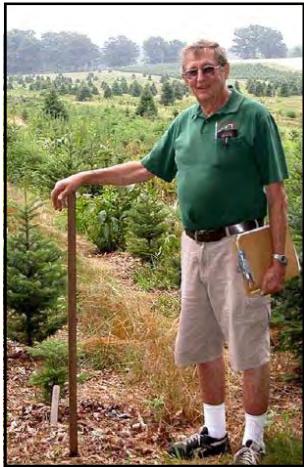
Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

January 2013

Special points of interest:



• John Ahrens Remembered

The NHVTCTA lost a longtime member, friend and expert researcher in November with the death of John Ahrens. See page 9 for an excerpt of John's obituary, followed by some remembrances.

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Winter Meeting at VT Farm Show

The Winter Meeting of the NHVTCTA will be held Tuesday, Jan. 29, at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds in Essex Jct., Vt.

Just as last year, our meeting will be held in conjunction with the Vermont Farm Show that will also be taking place there.

Following a business meeting, we will have a presentation by representatives from the Vermont Department of Labor that will focus on Employee Tax and Worker Comp issues. This will include information on employees vs. contractors and there will be plenty of time to ask specific questions.

Following a BBQ chicken lunch, we'll have our traditional marketing sales update with a chance for everyone to share and learn about the past sales season from the perspective of both choose-and-cut and wholesale growers.

Finally, Jeff Carter, agronomist with UVM Extension, will join us to discuss soils management, with a particular focus on lime products used to adjust soil pH.

If you have not already registered for the meeting, contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-1900, or register at the meeting (no lunch guaranteed).

As usual, there will be a Christmas tree (and wreath) competition at the Vermont Farm Show (open to members of both states). Trees must be delivered in person no later than 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 29.

Wreath entries (12-inch metal ring diameter, double faced wreath decorated/undecorated) judged excellent will receive \$10.00 Christmas trees judged excellent will receive \$12.00.

The Class Winner in each tree class (6-8 foot true fir, pine and "other") will receive \$10.00 and a ribbon. The Best of Show in each category of products will receive \$50.00 and Best of Show ribbon.

Entries meeting acceptable class standards, but not judged as excellent, will receive an Honorable Mention ribbon.

For more precise details about the product competitions, please contact Jackie Folsom, manager of the 2013 Vermont Farm Show, at 802-426-3579. You can't win if you don't play!



President's Message:

Greetings to all in the New Year! I hope everyone had a good tree/wreath sales season. In fact, I understand some of us closed earlier than expected rather than cut into next year's lots.

On a sad note – it is a loss to all of us in the passing of John Ahrens in November. Our hearts go out to Phyllis. We are grateful to John and Phyllis that they conserved their Vermont land for future generations. A full tribute appears elsewhere in this issue of *Tree Line*.

Our hosts for our September meeting in Canada, Larry and Marlene Downey, did

themselves proud. The afternoon field sessions covered shearing, the downside of soil compaction, soils oxygen needs, planting methods, use of herbicides and growth problems in successive rotations.

The non-field tour members enjoyed presentations on wreath making and decorating and generating more business through supplying wreaths for corporate gifts.

Our indoor January meeting promises some really new topics. Plan to attend!

Cheers to all.

*Mary Lou Schmidt
President*

Trading Post

FOR SALE: 32 gal. Solo 419 Mist Blower with teleblast head on 3 pt hitch: \$400; Mohawk 40 Brush hog, \$300, Kelco 18" manual netter on stand: \$75; 18" netter with PTO driven winch: \$50; Call Rob at 802-475-2322 or rudds@gmavt.net

WANTED: Interested in buying a Kelco power basal pruner. Must be in good working condition. Would consider buying the shaft/cutter only without the power head. Also looking for small quantity (case or a few cartridges) of 26" Kelco tree netting. Call Patrick at (802) 223-4258 or email pwhitevt@aol.com



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



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2013 Tree Line Publication Schedule

Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	
June	June 7
September	Sept. 6



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Research to Address Major Christmas Tree Problems

*By Bob Hoffmann
Washington State University*

Researchers at WSU and other universities hope to battle both of these problems with the support of a five-year, \$1.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

"The Christmas tree industry has some big challenges," said WSU researcher Gary Chastagner. "We hope that this national project will bring together scientific expertise and techniques to address these two issues." Focusing on true firs, the researchers will leverage the genomics groups at North Carolina State University and the University of California, Davis to find genetic markers for Phytophthora resistance and needle retention.

"Phytophthora root rot plagues all regions where firs are grown as Christmas trees," said John Frampton, a geneticist at NCSU and a collaborator on the project. There is no effective control for Phytophthora, so the best way to tackle the problem is to find resistant tree species.

Selecting for health

Chastagner's graduate student, Katie McKeever, is collecting isolates of Phytophthora in various growing areas. By sequencing these samples and conducting pathogenicity trials, McKeever will contribute critical information to the team's search for mechanisms of resistance in trees. Once the researchers find the relevant genetic markers, they can screen



adult trees and select the most promising as seed sources for viable Christmas tree plantations.

The team will use similar techniques to resolve the matter of needle shedding. Chastagner's multi-decade cataloging of Christmas trees with varying degrees of postharvest needle retention will give this part of the project a jump-start. By using these and other trees, scientists will be able to quickly identify needle-retentive gene sources so growers can produce desirable Christmas trees.

Research to the market

But even if growers have trees that don't suffer root rot or needle loss, how can they be sure consumers will flock to buy their new and improved products? After all, the number of live Christmas trees sold in the United States has remained relatively static for decades. Any increase in the Christmas tree market is absorbed by the number of artificial trees sold each year.

To address the stalled market growth for live Christmas trees, Jeff Joireman, WSU asso-

ciate professor of marketing, will research specific consumer preferences with a nationally representative survey followed by focus groups. Rick Dungey of the National Christmas Tree Association expects the data to expand the types of trees offered at commercial lots and U-cut farms across the country.

Increasing variety

"Some people want an old-fashioned tree like grandma had," he said, referring to a live tree with a more open structure, in contrast to the closely-sheared, densely branched trees crafted by today's Christmas tree industry. Dungey also noted the availability of live tree rentals in some areas, as well as narrow "condo" or "loft" trees in New York City favored by those with insufficient space for the traditionally broad Christmas tree.

"Consumers want more types and styles of trees," he said. "The marketing part of this project will examine the Christmas tree industry from the end user's perspective and allow the industry to respond to those desires."

Other participants on the grant include Ross Whetten, NCSU forestry and environmental resources; David Neale, UC Davis plant science; Rick Bates, Penn State University horticulture; and Bert Cregg, Michigan State University departments of horticulture and forestry. The National Christmas Tree Association is collaborating on the project.

Courtesy of Washington State University News Center

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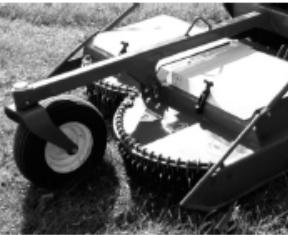


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Canaan Fir Flourishes as Christmas Tree, But Not in Wild

Source: West Virginia Public Broadcasting, Dec. 24, 2012

One of the most enduring traditions for many families at Christmas is decorating a live tree but one variety of fir found in West Virginia that is a popular Christmas tree is struggling in the wild.

The Canaan fir is a type of Balsam found only in the highlands of West Virginia and Virginia. But many Christmas tree farms in the region also grow Canaan firs.

"The Christmas tree farmers started growing our firs from ones that were first collected in Canaan Valley and that's why they're called Canaan fir," Rodney Bartgis, state director of The Nature Conservancy in West Virginia, said.

"Canaan fir has some of the good qualities of the balsam fir up north and some of the good qualities of the Fraser fir that are found farther south."

"The needles are not as sharp as they are on like a spruce tree from say a red spruce or a Norway spruce that are sold for Christmas trees," Bartgis said.

"Nor are the needles as long as they are for pine trees like white pine that are sold for Christmas trees and they have a very aromatic smell which is, balsam is one of the well-known scents at Christmas time." While Canaan firs flourish at Christmas tree farms, in their native Canaan Valley they are struggling. That's because of an Asian insect called the Balsam

woolly adelgid, which Bartgis said started becoming prominent in the state in the late 1980's.

"And since then it's wiped out most of our wild balsam firs," he said. "There's probably only about 20 percent if that many of our wild fir trees left in West Virginia."

Bartgis said in some places most of the adult Canaan fir are dead, but there are still some to be found in Canaan Valley. "If you go to Canaan Valley today you can still find fairly large fir trees in the wild but they are certainly becoming fewer and fewer," he said.

The Nature Conservancy is one of several groups, including the Mountain Institute, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service, which have been active in trying to save the trees.

"In Pocahontas County at Blister Swamp we've worked with the family that owns that site to both fence cattle out of the wetland where the fir trees had been as well as deer out of that wetland and reintroduce young fir trees that were raised from cones that were gathered



A Canaan Valley fir stands out against a backdrop of mixed fir forest.

from the few remaining live mature trees at that site," Bartgis said.

Similar measures are being taken in Canaan Valley at the National Wildlife Refuge and Timberline Ski Resort.

Bartgis said even though Canaan fir is cultivated widely by tree farms, it's important to save the trees that grow in the wild in the highlands of West Virginia because they are an important contributor to that area's eco system and part of the state's natural heritage.



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Don't Miss Valuable Meetings!

If you've missed any of the NHVTCTA meetings lately, you've missed a lot. Our Association holds three meetings each year: January, June and September. Each offers opportunities to learn from both research experts and your fellow growers; to see other farms and find out how they operate; and, finally, get to know your fellow members. Below are a few photos from our meetings in 2012. We hope to see you at our 2013 meetings!



Scientists Say Cloning Answer to Perfect Tree

Editor's Note: The following article appeared, appropriately enough, in the Dec. 25, 2012, issue of Time Magazine.

Just in time for Christmas, researchers say they have discovered the secret behind the perfect Christmas tree. After years of studying the reproduction mechanism of the Caucasian fir, Germany's most common Christmas tree variety, scientists at Berlin's Humboldt University say they have been able to reproduce Christmas trees by cloning their seeds.

Their Frankentrees, they say, will grow to be perfectly shaped, resistant to greenflies and other insects and perfectly colored — and they won't lose needles.

Professor Kurt Zoglauer, who has been leading the research project, is quick to point out that perfection doesn't mean that the trees will be identical. "We have developed trees with a variety of characteristics, making them all beautiful in their own way," the botanist said in a university press release. "Single households prefer smaller trees that fit into smaller apartments."

Two-thirds of the almost 28 million Christmas trees sold in Germany are Caucasian firs, which originate in Georgia, Abkhazia and Russia. German Environmentalists have been up in arms recently against the country's Xmas-industrial complex, which they allege is re-

placing large swathes of indigenous forest with Caucasian fir farms. Four German states have already set in place legislation requiring permits for Christmas tree plantations.

The breakthrough could be a boon for the Christmas tree industry the United States, only recently recovered from stagnating demand half a decade ago. In 2007, the year with the most recent available public data from the Department of Agriculture, some 17.4 million Christmas trees were cut to be sold across the U.S. — 16% fewer than in 2002. Last year, the number of trees sold jumped to 30.8 million, according to the National Christmas Tree Association.

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John Ahrens Remembered

Editor's Note: The NHVTCTA lost a longtime member, friend and expert researcher in November with the death of John Ahrens, who was named an Honorary Life Member of our association in 2007. Following is an excerpt of John's obituary, followed by some remembrances from two of our members who knew John personally.

John F. Ahrens, PhD, 82, of Simsbury and formerly of Bloomfield, beloved husband of Phyllis (Carle) Ahrens, passed away shortly after a stroke on November 10, 2012, surrounded by his family. Born in Bellmore, NY, son of the late William & Martha (Schneider) Ahrens, he was raised on Long Island and graduated from Mepham High School. He was a graduate of the Long Island Agricultural and Technical Institute (Farmingdale) where he enlisted in the US Marine Corps inactive reserve. After graduation, he worked two years in the Soil Conservation Service in Millbrook, NY where he met and dated Phyllis Carle. He was called to active duty and served a one year tour in Korea during the war, where he earned the rank of Sergeant, USMC. After returning in May of '52, he married Phyllis and they moved to Athens, GA where he received a BSA from the Univ. of Georgia. He then earned both an MS & PhD in Plant Physiology from Iowa State University, after which he began his long career in Weed Science at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Valley Laboratory in Windsor.



John Ahrens devoted himself to sharing his knowledge with members of the NHVTCTA and Christmas tree growers everywhere.

After retirement, he continued as a Weed Scientist, Emeritus, at the Experiment Station, as well as performing research and consulting throughout the Northeast and Canada until shortly before his death. He was a member and past president of both the National & Northeastern Weed Science Societies of America.

In addition, he owned and operated the Ahrens Tree Farm of Bloomfield, CT & West Woodbury, VT. He was an active member of the National, CT, NH/VT, & NY Christmas Tree Growers Associations and worked vigorously to assist in the registration of new, effective protocols for weed control in Christmas trees and ornamentals.

Contributions may be made to either Old St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 59 Tariffville Rd., Bloomfield, CT 06002 or the American Heart Association, 1 Union St., Suite 301, Robbinsville, NJ 08691.

Submitted by Peter Mollica:

John and I go way back. We were both raised in the same little town (North Bellmore) on Long Island and attended the same elementary and high school. But he was a young kid, about two grades behind me so naturally I would never have had anything to do with an underclassman like him.

We did not really meet until I started in the Christmas tree business in 1982, when I begged him to help me. He agreed and we worked together for about two years before we realized that we had a childhood connection.

In a very short time our relationship changed from business to a close friendship which never wavered. I miss him deeply. His passing has left a very large hole in my life.

His contribution to the Christmas tree industry and particularly to our association is incalculable. All of us will re-

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NHVTCTA Members Donate 420 Trees to TFT Program

Members of the New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association donated 420 trees this past holiday season to Trees for Troops, the national program that provides Christmas Trees to armed forces members and their families. Na-

nationally, 18,694 free, farm-grown Christmas Trees were donated by growers in November and December 2012, bringing the total during the eight-year tenure of the program to more than 121,000 trees.

FedEx donated the ground and air delivery of the trees to 65 military bases in the U.S. and Middle East, covering every branch of the armed services.



TREES FOR TROOPS
www.treesfortroops.org

"The giving spirit of the Real Christmas Tree industry, the public and FedEx was once again overwhelming in 2012," said Nigel Manley, Christmas SPIRIT Foundation chairman. "To bring a joyful, traditional Christmas to more than

18,000 military families and service men and women is truly humbling, and it is the generosity of these donors and volunteers who make Trees for Troops possible."

Trees for Troops – a program of the Christmas SPIRIT Foundation in conjunction with FedEx, the National Christmas Tree Association and many state and regional Christmas Tree associations – has received

thousands of thank-you messages and photos, many of which are posted at www.TreesForTroops.org and on the organization's Facebook page, www.facebook.com/Trees4Troops.

Deliveries to military bases all over the country started in late November and ended in mid-December with a grand total of 18,694 trees. FedEx and its team members generously provide shipping to U.S. military bases through FedEx Express air operations and the FedEx Freight trucking network. Fundraising to make the 2013 Trees for Troops program possible has already begun. Donations may be tax deductible. To donate or learn more, visit www.treesfortroops.org.

Tractor Safety Course for Teens

Teens looking to learn how to operate tractors and farm machinery are encouraged to take a certification course offered in March and April. The course is put on by the University of Ver-

mont Extension 4-H and the Environmental Resource Management program of the Randolph Technical Career Center. The course costs \$60 with classes on March 2, 9 and 23 and April 13

from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the technical career center in Randolph. Some home study is also required.

The fee covers all sessions, lunches, materials and testing fee. Tractor safety certification is a legal requirement for 14- and 15-year-olds who are employed on a farm other than that of their parents or guardians, but the training is recommended for all youths ages 14 to 19 working in agriculture.

The course will provide hands-on instruction for operating tractors over 20 horsepower and other farm equipment. For more information and to register, call (802) 656-2034 or email kristen.mullins@uvm.edu

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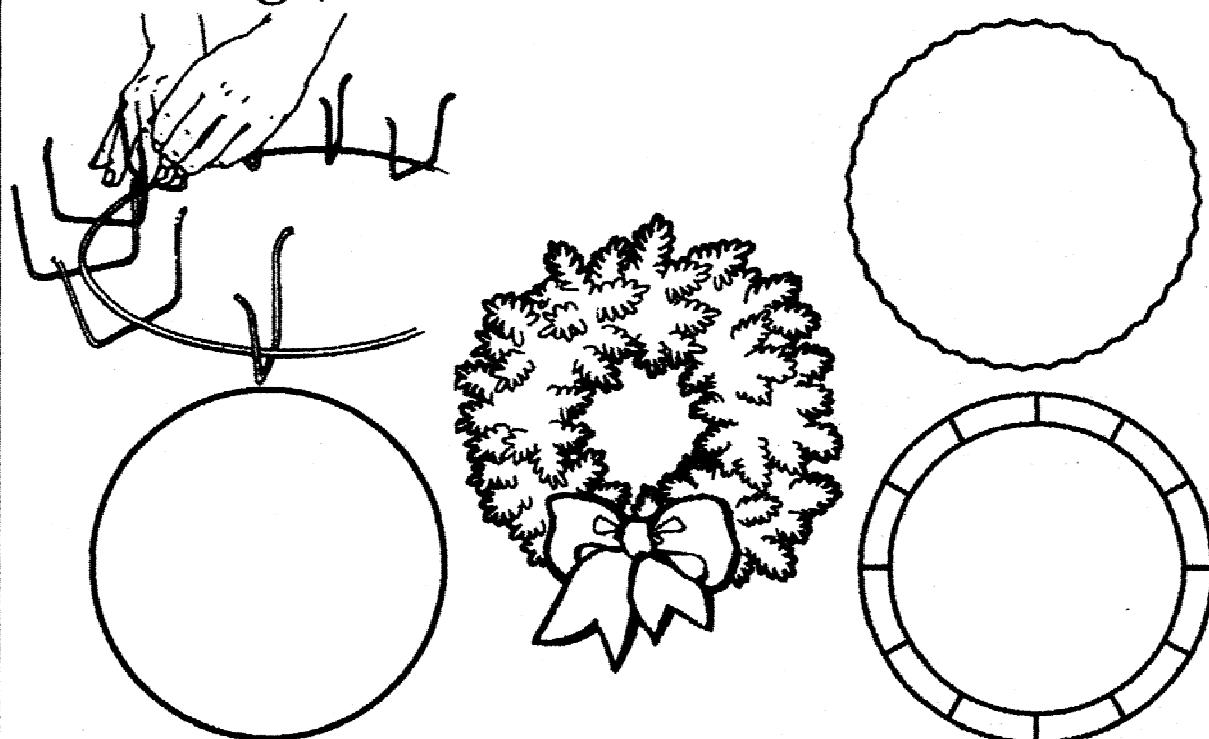
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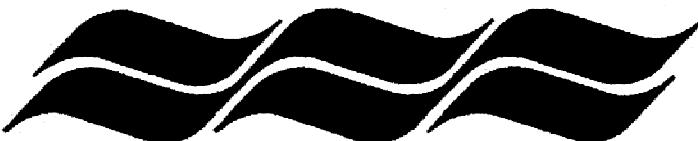
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John Ahrens Remembered

Continued from Page 9

member his presence at pretty near every meeting providing his insights and suggestions to all of us. We all owe John an enormous debt for his support. He was one of a kind and irreplaceable.

Submitted by Bob White:

We have all been fortunate to have had John involved with our association, and many of us would call him a good friend, he has directly or indirectly helped most all of us better understand the growing process.

John last spoke at Bill Testers farm, he was not on the agenda that day he just started by answering a few questions that kept coming for a long time, Whenever John spoke it was pretty clear everyone was trying hard to listen.

John retired as a paid weed scientist about 20 years ago, his replacement started about 18 years ago. John never stooped going to work, it was clear he loved what he did.

Fortunately for all of us John was a very frugal person, when his children where young he decided to buy a second place for the weekends, the place he found (because the land was cheap) was in Vermont. A run-down old farm made a great place for kids and parents to bond, and then came Christmas trees without that old farm most of us would not have got to know John.

Christmas trees became part of his blood which continued right to the end, in the last couple years he had been working with other Christmas tree specialist around the world to

find and experiment with future potential tree types for our markets. The day of John's memorial in Connecticut Dr. Rich Cowles took me on a tour of the Valley Lab and the work John was focused on. A good portion of the experiment station is planted with Christmas tree trials that will continue. Whenever I called John with a question it was very clear he wanted to try his best to understand the situation and try to be as helpful as possible. I had 3 phone numbers for John on my office wall; he wanted to make sure we could contact him anytime we wanted his advise.

John over the years had learned what it took to kill trees, and what they seemed to thrive with. Luckily for us he was willing to share his knowledge with all of us.



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