

Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

June 2009

Special point of interest:

♦ **Nominating Committee:** Anyone interested in running for a position on the NHVTCTA Board of Directors should contact Ben Hoyt at (603) 838-6403. Elections will take place later this summer.

♦ **Group Buying:** The NHVTCTA offers a number of group buying opportunities for members. Those interested should contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-1900 for more information.

♦ **Planning Ahead:** Upcoming NHVTCTA meeting dates and locations have been set:

Fall Meeting
Sept. 26, 2009
Sibgo Tree Farm
Colebrook, N.H.

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Summer Meeting Preview: Paxton Greens

Russ and Donna Reay will be hosting the NHVTCTA's Summer Meeting at their farm, Paxton Greens, in Cuttingsville, Vt. The meeting will take place Saturday, June 20, and if you've not already registered, registration is available at the meeting.

In addition to learning about the innovative techniques being used at Paxton Greens, the meeting will also provide information on a number of other important topics, including:

- A review of the national market order ("Checkoff") program being debated in the Christmas tree industry, along with a Trees for Troops update by Nigel Manley, the NHVTCTA's national director.

- An update on new and effective chemicals available for Christmas tree growers, by Dick Cole/Helena Chemical.

- A look at the tools, timing and advantages of basal pruning, by Bob White.

- Two field tour stations covering the development of new plantations (including Q&A with Bill Nichols, Jay Weir, Ben Hoyt and Mike Godzyk) as well as a shearing demonstration by Ben Hoyt.

- A weed identification and control presentation by John Ahrens.

Thanks to Mike Godzyk, Russ Reay and others for putting together such a well-rounded meeting.

National "Checkoff" program

As noted above, one topic for discussion at the NHVTCTA Summer Meeting will center around the possibility of a national "Checkoff Program."

The USDA administers Checkoff programs and explains them this way: "Authorized by federal legislation, these programs are designed to strengthen the position of the industry in the marketplace and to maintain and expand domestic and foreign markets. The programs are all fully funded by industry assessments. Board members are nominated by industry and appointed officially by the Secretary of Agriculture. AMS oversees the activities of the boards or councils and approves budgets, in order to assure compliance with the legislation."

Simply put, this means collecting an assessment from those in an industry based, in this case, on the number of trees sold as a

way of funding programs to improve the overall market position of a given product, in this case Christmas trees.

Other agricultural-related industries that currently have Checkoff programs include beef, dairy, eggs, blueberries, potatoes and a number of others.

A Checkoff Task Force made up of various Christmas tree growers has studied the issue. In March, the group recommending asking USDA to consider such a program for Christmas trees. Based on the information assembled and various recommendations, the National Christmas Tree Association board voted to support a Checkoff program.

The discussion at the Summer Meeting will shed more light on the details, such as the amount that would be assessed per tree. Also check <http://www.checkoffstudy.com> for updates.

President's Message: On the soapbox again...

I hope this finds all of you in good health, your planting done successfully, and that 2009 will be a good year for all of us.

I am jumping on my podium to write about what the National Christmas Tree Association does for us and encourage more of you to join as full members. National needs our full support! There are only 17 farms who are full members of the National Association in all of Vermont and New Hampshire. That is pretty poor—Nova Scotia has almost twice that many members.

Here are just some things that National does *for all of us*.

- The Christmas Spirit Foundation (along with FedEx) runs Trees for Troops and they won a Silver Halo Award for cause marketing. That publicity benefits all of us. The Christmas Spirit Foundation (which I equate with National, even though it's an offshoot) is raffling off a \$14,000 New Holland tractor to raise money to keep the spirit of Christmas going for kids, families,

and the environment. They also joined with the Army Corp of Engineers to recycle several hundred trees in a Missouri lake and got positive publicity for that. And they hosted an online charity auction in support of the Christmas Spirit Foundation.

- Lobbied and got agricultural status for Christmas tree production nationwide. Then this spring had to lobby some more to keep the Department of Labor from suspending the new rules that would eliminate agricultural status for Christmas trees in all states but N.C., S.C., Va., and Md. Agricultural status for Christmas tree helps all of us and the payrolls of those who hire workers.

- Keeps tabs on the fake tree industry and their marketing, and tries hard to counter and set the record straight. Want to see what we and National are up against? Check out this link:

<http://www.artificialtrees.com/environment.php>

- Led the discussion and possible development of a national

check-off program to market real, farm grown trees. Continues to operate the Real Tree Core Marketing Programs.

That's only a sample of what National does for *ALL* of us. True, the NH-VT CTA is a Tree Industry Partnership (TIP) participant, but giving your farm full membership gives you access to a lot more, the very least of which is satisfaction that you are more fully participating in the industry.

You may not be able to afford to take advantage of all of National's great meetings and events—I sure wish I could attend them all—but I'm sure some of you bigger growers could. If I can sell less than 1,500 trees and benefit from belonging to National, no doubt that many of you, especially some of you bigger growers, could benefit much more.

I hope to see everyone at Paxton Greens on June 20.

*Rich Rockwood,
President*



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



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2009 Tree Line Publication Schedule

Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	--
June	--
September	August 14



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Research Report: 2009 Growing Issues—Frost and Aphids

Editor's Note: Bob White has again taken the time to share what he's learned—both on his own farm and by calling regional experts and asking questions. If you have tried something that worked, or found out the hard way that something didn't, please follow Bob's lead and take a moment to send in an account. The grammar isn't important to your fellow members, but the information is.

By Bob White

2009 has been a challenging year for some of us in the Christmas tree business. Each year we draw on our past growing experiences and hope we can make the right choices. This year two problems have been common in our region: frost and aphids. Both were a little different than in past years.

Frost

The May 25 frost damaged

early flushed trees. The temperature stayed at 30 degrees F at our farm for about 10 hours, which wilted any growth out of the bud. Luckily only about 10% of the trees on our farm had bud break that early. Normally we have thought that only temperatures below 28 degree F could do damage, but we learned that time also influences damage from frost.

Aphids

The aphids came on as normal with no big surprises; often there is not too much damage and spraying is optional for many. This year was very different: their populations exploded rapidly. The IPM practice of waiting to see how much damage was going to happen was a poor choice for our operation this year. Then we allowed it to get worse with our chemical choices and timing.



Ron Kelley/Mt. Dept. Forests, Parks and Rec.

The characteristic curled needles on balsam fir resulting from balsam twig aphid.

I sprayed OnyxPro on May 21 and 22. One week later, after seeing no results I started looking for advice. I found that other growers did not know a whole lot about this chemical, other than it having a great reputation. So I contacted Dr. Richard Cowles, of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, who has

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Research Report: 2009 Weed Control Update

By John F. Ahrens

NHVTCTA honorary lifetime member and plant scientist emeritus, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Windsor, Conn.

Westar is the latest addition to our arsenal of herbicides to control weeds in Christmas trees. Applied in the spring before bud break it controls a broad spectrum of weeds including most annuals and many perennials. Among the perennial weeds that Westar controls are quackgrass, yellow nutsedge, field horsetail

(*Equisetum spp*) and wild raspberry. It also suppresses bindweed.

Westar also is quite inexpensive. It currently is available for about \$33 per pound and only 8 to 12 ounces per treated acre usually are required. If one treats 50 percent bands (3 ft. bands in rows 6 ft. apart), the cost can be about \$12 or less per acre of trees. One New York State grower that I know has successfully used 6 ounces per acre two years in a row, for about \$6 per acre of trees per year.

Despite these advantages,

Westar is definitely not for growers who spot treat and do not calibrate their sprayers. The potential for tree injury is too great for spot treatment with Westar. However, we have shown repeatedly that calibration of even backpack sprayers is easy and results in more precise and rapid applications. Detailed instructions are available on request.

This past year we investigated further the safety of Westar in newly planted Colorado spruce and the safety and efficacy of fall plus spring use of Westar in Colorado spruce that had been established in the field for one year. Applied two springs in a row on young Colorado spruce, Westar at 8 or more ounces per acre significantly reduced the terminal growth of the spruce despite good-to-excellent weed control. Similarly, fall applications of 6 ounces per acre followed by spring applications of 8 or more ounces per acre also significantly reduced spruce terminal growth. SureGuard at 12 ounces per acre in the spring with Roundup at 24 ounces per acre in one experiment or SureGuard at 12 ounces per acre plus non-ionic surfactant in another had no deleterious effect on spruce growth. This was true despite the poorer control of field horsetail, horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*) and perennial grasses with SureGuard than with Westar.

For this reason we suggest SureGuard or simazine plus a preemergence grass herbicide combination (i.e. Princep + Surflan) for newly planted trees and delaying Westar application until the trees have been established in the field for two or more seasons.

For fall applications, no herbicide controls the broad spectrum of woody plants and most perennials as well as Roundup Original. Combinations of Roundup Original or equivalent



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Research Report: 2009 Growing Issues—Frost and Aphids

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spoken at several summer meetings. He was very helpful and knowledgeable about the properties of OnyxPro.

On many of our farms we have wide-ranging bud break timing with early balsam out the first week of May, late balsam and Fraser out the last week of May, and super-late stuff out the first week in June. Dr. Cowles advised that the right timing for OnyxPro was early, at the early stage of bud break. By waiting until the third week of May, the aphids were well protected and not affected by OnyxPro because it requires contact.

He advised that spraying Lorsban at that point was also not likely to be really helpful and may hurt in the long run as it would wipe out the beneficial predators. He suggested we look at a product called Provado 1.6F with Silwet L-77 as a better choice for aphid

control. He feels that Provado will kill most aphids but not harm many predators, which could reduce the need to spray in future years.

The question now is: Can we control gall midge with the same early spray, or will we need a second application at a later date on the years that they hit?

Unfortunately, Dr. Cowles' research with Douglas fir needle midge suggests that Provado may not be useful against the needle midges. Therefore, if you have had problems with both needle midge and balsam twig aphid, the only registered insecticide that will be effective against both pests is OnyxPro, applied just before or at the beginning of bud break. Good spray coverage will be important for this insecticide to work.

I had some Lorsban available so I used it about June 2 and, as expected, it was not really helpful for about a week, although about

June 9 the population crashed. Generally, there was more damage than I would have tolerated.

On June 1, I sprayed Onyx on the Canaan fir. I am still waiting to see if this will work, but early indication is that it will take time, as the aphids are going strong on June 10. This is the first time I have had Canaan fir damaged by aphids.

Herbicides

For herbicides, this has been a good year so far on our farm. Fall Roundup followed by a Westar application in the spring has worked very well the past two years. Each year, application was timed right with respect to rainfall. We are seeing very good results with a 2.5 ounce per acre rate of Westar. Next year I will move down to 1.5 ounce on our light soils. Transplants look good with no damage as long as enough rain settled the roots before spraying.

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Research Report: 2009 Weed Control Update

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at 1 1/3 qts. per acre, alone or plus SureGuard at 6 ounces per acre or Princep at 2 lbs. per acre, kill those weeds and prevent infestations of weeds that germinate in the fall and early spring. In spring-planted white pine or Douglas fir, Westar at 6 ounces per acre in September or later could be a good substitute because young white pine and Douglas fir are sensitive to injury from Roundup applied over the top. Then, one can follow in the spring either with Westar at 6 to 8 ounces per acre or other herbicides such as SureGuard or Princep plus Surflan or Princep plus Pennant Magnum.

Other findings

In 2008, Dr. Todd Mervosh and I also evaluated the tolerance of 10 newly planted conifers to the combination of Roundup, Goal and Stinger and that of a corn herbicide called Callisto (active ingredient of Mesotrione). Four of the conifers are grown by nurserymen (yew, juniper Canadian hemlock and arbor vitae) and the others are grown for Christmas trees or for ornamental uses. They included white, Norway and Colorado spruce, white pine, Fraser fir, Douglas-fir, Hicks yew, Blue Star juniper, Emerald green arborvitae and Canadian hemlock. The three-way combination of Roundup at 4 ounces per acre plus Goal Tender at 8 ounces per acre and Stinger at 4 ounces per acre and double these rates were applied over the top in June and a month later with excellent postemergence control and no significant conifer injury. This combination, with Goal 2XL at 16 ounces instead of Goal Tender 4F at 8 ounces per acre, also has worked well in June in second-year seedbeds and transplant beds. Remember that Goal Tender 4F is a less volatile, more concentrated formulation of Goal 2XL. A number of growers have

said to me that they would never spray Roundup over the top in conifers during the growing season. My answer is that dosage makes the difference. When we talk of 4 ounces per acre we are talking about a dose only 1/8th to 1/11th that of a normal over the top application of Roundup in the fall.

Callisto is not yet registered for conifers so it is a possible summer postemergence treatment for future use. We will continue to evaluate it because it controls yellow nutsedge as well as many broadleaf and grassy annuals.. However, Callisto fails to control certain annual grasses such as fall panicum.

Don't forget that we still have the postemergence grass herbicides for summer use in conifer seedbeds, transplant beds and in the field. These include Fusilade, Envoy and Segment, the new name for what we knew as Vantage (sethoxydim). Vantage in Canada is now the equivalent of Roundup Original, containing glyphosate, so try not to confuse the two.

In experiments many years ago I learned that combinations of Fusilade with Goal 2XL at 1 pt. per acre also were effective in controlling many broadleaf and grassy annual weeds in conifers during the summer. Doubling the rate of Fusilade controlled the perennial quackgrass as well.

In cooperation with Karen Bennett of the University of New Hampshire I have updated the *2009 New England Guide to Chemical Weed and Brush Control in Christmas Trees*. Single copies can be obtained from UNH Cooperative Extension, Nesmith Hall, Durham, NH 03824 or it can be downloaded from the UNH Cooperative Extension Web site at www.unhwwoods.org, then search, using the title, *New England Guide to Weed and Brush in Christmas Trees*.

If you have any questions on weeds in Christmas trees, you may call me at 860-683-4985 or Dr. Todd Mervosh at 860-683-4984.

First published in the spring 2009 issue of The Real Tree Line.

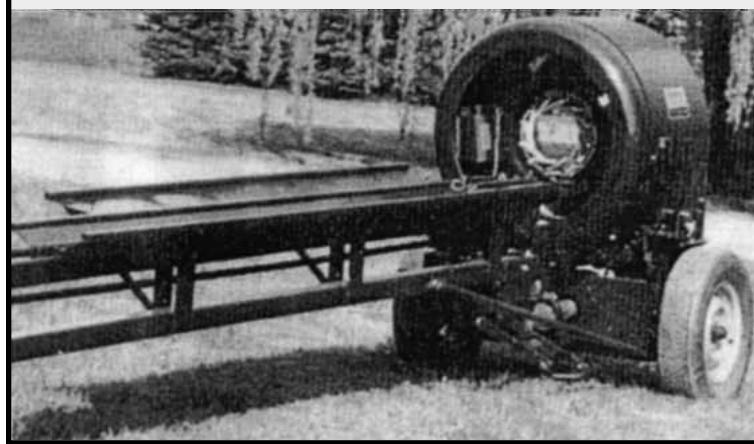
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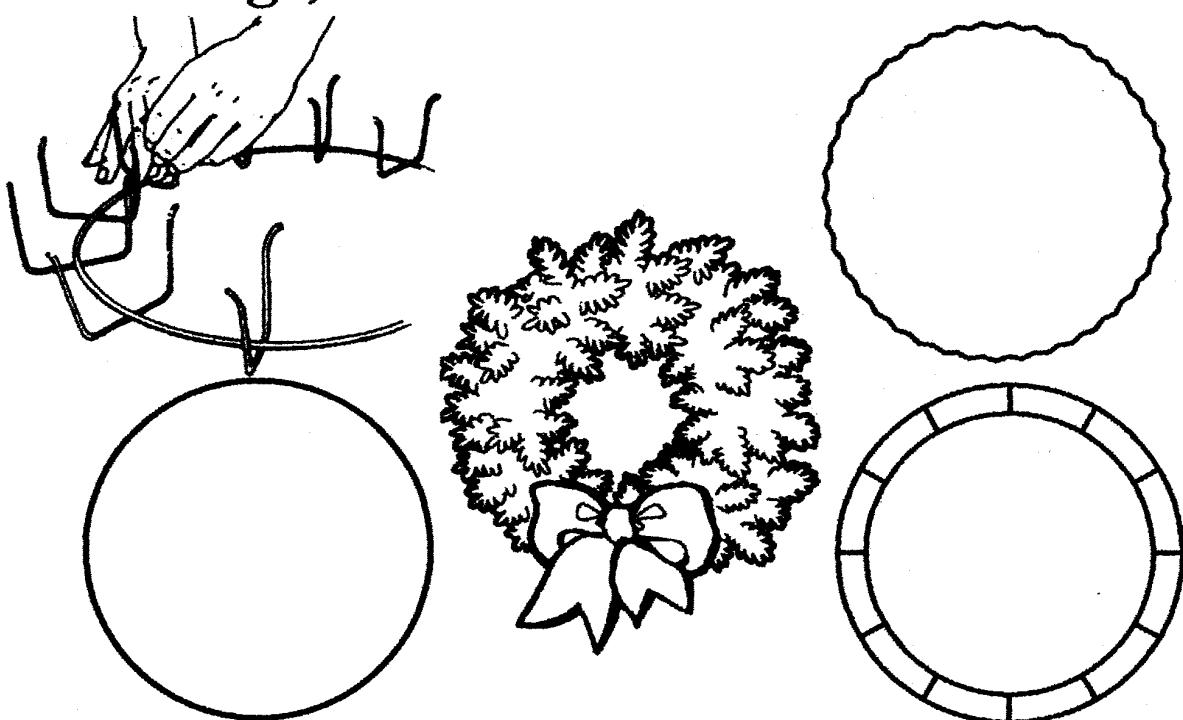
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Member Perspective: 28 Years of Successful Tagging

**By Mary Lou &
Bill Schmidt
Elysian Hills Tree Farm
Dummerston, VT**

Editor's Note: Thanks to Mary Lou and Bill for taking the time to put together this counter-point to Mike Ahern's article that ran in the last issue regarding the difficulties he's encountered with tagging. The National Christmas Tree Association's magazine asked permission to reprint Mike's article, so there's clearly interest in the tagging issue. And now that Mary Lou and Bill have shared their positive tagging experiences, we all get a chance to see both sides of the story.

In 2008 we tagged 354 trees and lost only four. Two because the customers tried to hide their name and ribbon (despite instructions), and two we accidentally cut in November for wholesale. In these cases, customers get a choice to: a. Choose another tree; b. Choose a pre-cut tree; or c. Get a refund.

Approximately one-third of our trees are tagged and the money is banked in October.

Some advice for tagging:

1. Do not tag trees in your busy December retail season.

2. Do not combine with a Choose & Cut operation. In fact, *no customer ever cuts their own tree at Elysian Hills.*

3. Choose at least two weekends when you are less busy. October works well. The weather is generally good, foliage is beautiful and the trees look their best.

4. Choose a 3- to 4-hour period each day and be consistent each year with your weekends and times.

5. Tape off an area of 75 to 100 even-size trees (7' room size is good) and have all the trees in that lot be the same price. If your plantation is large enough, you should have a different lot each weekend, of even better, each time you are open. This takes

care of "all the good trees are already tagged."

6. Assign a "Lot Monitor" to the lot to help customers with tagging, measuring, and/or answering questions. This also discourages possible tag switching. The monitor should make sure customers tag *only* in the assigned lot. If you have big trees elsewhere on the farm, pre-price these with a two-part tag. This is handled differently. Check with us on "how to." This is the only reason a customer would not be in the assigned lot.

7. Signing in: Have 1 or 2 people checking customers in. Do not allow early birds to go to the lot before your stated time (you'll blow your whole system). Have customers fill in a registration slip with name, address, phone number and Dec. pickup week. The checker explains the tagging method, gives customer a color-coded ribbon (Dec. pickup week), name tag, safety tag and lot map. The customer pays for the tree in full, including Vermont tax. Don't deal with deposits, you'll go bonkers. This also assures customer will come back for the tree.

8. Once they've tagged their tree, you never need to deal with the tag customer again, until next year.

9. All of our Tag Day help are paid "in kind" (tree, wreath, greenery, etc.) Time to bring in all your friends to help at the different times you're open.

10. When your last Tag Weekend is over, *close the farm for all tagging*. Then you can go in and pre-price your retail trees and/or flag your wholesale trees.

11. When it's time for pick-up, use the color-coded ribbons for the week in question. If you harvest on Mondays through Wednesdays, you'll have time to bring in the trees, rack them alphabetically and check to see if you have all of them for that week.

12. We allow customer picks up *only* on Thursdays through

Sundays. Customers are told in October where to pick trees up and to "bring your own help for tie on."

13. Have your racks well away from your pre-cut retail trees (out of sight if possible) or your retail customers will get confused. If your tag customer wants their tree netted/baled, ask at Tag Weekend time and this can be done when you harvest and not take up your time in retail season.

14. If you already allow tagging it will not be easy to "retrain" your customers. But remember, it's your plantation and you're in charge. You'll probably lose a few die-hard choose-and-cutters but you'll also save a lot of headaches.

Our tag customers like this method. They can choose their tree that's not buried in the snow. It's all paid for and they can cross it off their shopping list. We like it as we get a lot of trees sold ahead of snowed-out December weekends and the money is in the bank.

At the June meeting we will have a table with all of our tagging supplies and information. We will be available to answer your questions and show you how it works. Check out our Web site: www.elysianhillsfarm.com. We list the Tag Weekends there every year.

Trading Post

WANTED: Electric tree/needle shaker. Also would be interested in pull-carts ("tree wheelers") that could be used by customers to get trees out of the field. Call Patrick White, 802-223-4258, or e-mail: pwhitevt@aol.com

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Editor's Desk: 90 Years Ago in the Christmas Tree Industry

In place of the roundup of miscellaneous news items that normally appears in this space, I wanted to share an item of historical interest that I came across. (I apologize for the small, old type.)

Lest we forget that the Christmas tree industry has been around for quite a while, this article from the *New York Times*, dated Dec. 21, 1919, should provide a bit of perspective. Even 90 years ago, Christmas trees were being harvested in Vermont (and, undoubtedly, New Hampshire). Though the techniques and quality may have fallen short of "modern" standards, imagine the effort that went into harvesting and transporting the trees. And note this article's assertion that 5 million trees were shipped out of state!

By FRED O. COPELAND.
In Vermont, where Christmas trees grow to the brightest emerald and to the best shape, two factions have developed. One, with a foresight of the forests the young spruce trees will make and the pulp and paper they may some day furnish, bewails the cutting for Christmas trees. The opposing school urges the Christmas tree industry for the reason that it clears the land for the farmer and at the same time allows more cheap feed for the young beef stock, which is allowed to run wild during the Summer months. But, whether or no,

5,000,000 Christmas trees are being shipped out of Vermont this year.

The trees come from abandoned farms, of which there are many in Vermont, especially in the Green Mountains, where forty years ago more than thirty actively worked farms existed and where now there are but two families living. These sections lie in high valleys in the foot-hills of the Green Mountains. Land that was once under the plow is coming back into forest. Along the fern-choked, faintly traced furrows young spruces come up and in the open sunshine take on a vivid green, and—more than that—the branches are a lively green clear to the

ground. Christmas trees cannot be cut in areas of spruce forest, because when they grow in dense clusters the under branches die for want of light.

Few, indeed, see the Christmas tree harvest. One or two lonely partridge hunters perhaps will walk through the treelots, covered with the first early snow squalls of the mountains. Even back in October, when the days had not lost all their mellowness, gang of twenty choppers began cutting and bundling with twine bunches of from one to six young

spruces. The cutting and bundling is the easiest part of the harvest, for the trees must be hauled for miles to the railroad and at this time of the year the mountain roads are frozen ruts and water holes. Despite this, two-horse heavy wagons and motor trucks bristling with great crib-like bodies struggle out loaded with three or four hundred trees at a time.

At the chosen town on the railroad every vacant spot is hired and a mountain of trees begins to grow till eight thousand of them will accumulate in a single pile. Immediately the loading on flat cars begins. As the great piles of trees are piled and packed between tall uprights on the cars the fragrance the sun has distilled from the emerald cones fills the air and it is a most delightful place to be. It is a place of color, too, for the sun throws bewitching lights through the bundles as they are moved about, and there arises not only the clean, sweet incense of spruce, but also a soft green glow that bathes the place with translucent light.



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