

Dec. 24, 1966 ... Our Christmas tree business is over until another year and it will be good to have our farm back. For the past three weeks, automobiles and pick-up trucks could be seen almost everywhere as people were either looking for that "perfect" tree or digging one out. With the exception of the very blue Blue Spruce, we charge the same price for any size tree (\$3.00 plus 15¢ tax) whether the tree is cut or dug, but the customer must dig his own tree if he wants a live one. We charge the same prices because the small trees will soon grow big and while the large ones (10-12 feet) are a bargain, they should be sold, so it all averages out and everyone is happy.

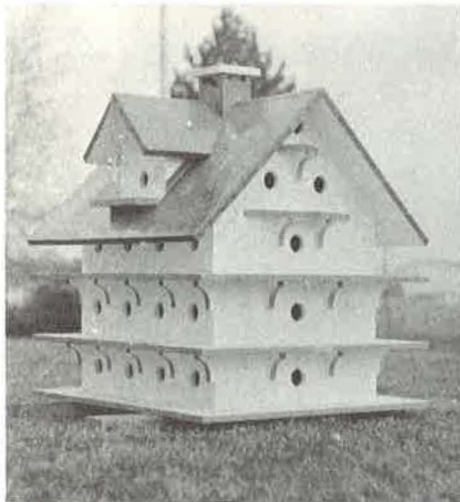
It is interesting to see the reactions of different people when they



Part of our Christmas trees. They are planted in blocks for customer convenience in driving among them. A few of the small trees in the foreground will be ready to go next Christmas.

select a tree (and listen to their comments). Some men, when they see all the different sizes and kinds of trees, immediately turn around and head for home to get the wife. Some wives come alone as they don't trust their husbands to pick a tree. Other wives tell me their husbands may leave home if they select another crooked tree. But the best laugh this year was when a man brought his two small children (a boy and a girl) to pick their tree. The little girl insisted on getting a particular 9-foot Norway Spruce. Her mother had given them all firm instructions that this year ... nothing but a small tree. After a lot of discussion, the father let his little girl have her way and the large spruce was cut. As I tied their tree in the trunk of their car, the little girl came over to me and said "if Mommy gets to yelling at me I'm going to blame it all on Daddy".

I often wonder where all the people come from to get their tree, since we do not live near a large city. Some come as early as October and spend several hours on nice days picking their tree (we furnish them a tag to mark it). We guarantee satisfaction and if they don't like the tree after getting it home, they are asked to bring it back (before Christmas) and trade it for a more suitable tree. I don't want anyone swearing at me on Christmas Day for selling them a bum tree. We furnish pine trimming free to anyone that can use it. This not only puts the poor trees to good use, but created good-will and helps assure repeat business next year.



My nice Christmas present from Mrs. Bell. Each floor is hinged (for banding the young) and each room has a slot for ventilation. The hot air goes up through a center shaft and out the chimney.

We started this Christmas tree business about 16 years ago for two reasons - to help with the college expenses for our two children and to provide roosting and nesting places for the birds. It takes 7 to 10 years for a pine tree to grow to Christmas tree size - longer for spruce. Also, I might add, it is not all profit. Seedlings must be purchased and planted each spring. Our son David spends about a month during June and July shearing (shaping) the trees. All weeds and briars are cut out and each tree is sickled around by hand. I am always amazed at how evergreens attract birds. In the winter, many juncos come to roost each evening from the surrounding countryside. The trees are not large enough for Starlings to roost, but flocks of Robins use them and even about 50 Robins were still coming in each evening at Christmas time.

This is always quite a surprise to evening Christmas tree customers who think all Robins have long ago left for the southern states.

A bird nest was found in perhaps a third of the trees cut. Most were Field Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Robin or Grackle nests. A few Red-wings nest in the pines every year (once one nested over 8 feet above the ground), but this species generally prefers the nearby meadows for nesting. Ground nesters like the Meadowlark and Grasshopper Sparrows often nest in the newly planted areas.

The Common Grackles moved in last summer for the first time. The Grackle is not my idea of a desirable bird but my efforts to discourage them had little effect as I found over 50 nests in the area shown in the picture. Evidently, one of the reasons for the Grackles' success is their ability to adapt. Thirty years ago all Grackle nests in this area were at least 15 feet above ground. This past season several were not over four feet and one was exactly three feet above the ground in a Scotch Pine. Most birds are quite desirable around an evergreen plantation to help keep injurious insects in check, but heavy birds like the Red-wings, Meadowlarks, Robins and Grackles can create problems when they alight on the tender new top growths during May and June. If these new tops are broken off, a deformed, unsaleable tree often results. To combat this problem, poles for perching are placed here and there among the trees.

Dec. 25 ... My Christmas present from my wife was really something - a beautiful 38-room Purple Martin box. Betty had Wesley Knisley make it (a friend that makes all my Bluebird boxes). It was quite a surprise as Betty complains so much about all my birding and banding activities. Maybe she has accepted the old adage ... if you can't whip 'em - join 'em. Betty does enjoy our Martins though and always looks forward to seeing them each spring and summer. They really do add a lot to country living.

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SEVILLE DAIR DAGO
TOUSUN BUSSIS INURO
NOJO DEMSTRUX
SUMIT COUSIN SUMIT
DUX

(If you can't figure this out, see translation in News in Brief.)