



NJCTGA News

Winter 2022

President's Message



Chris Nicholson

As I look out my window at the fresh snow that fell last night I can't help but wonder how our NJ weather is ever changing. Yesterday saw temperatures in the high 50's and I woke up to everything covered in white. It was a perfect morning to take a walk on my farm and

begin to start to plan my spring season, at least in my head.

I hope you all had a banner season in 2021. Our weather was nearly perfect and the demand for what we all offer seems to get better each year. I spoke to many of you either during the season or shortly after and the general sentiment was that we all need more trees. We, farmers of any sort, are finally somewhat in the drivers seat and can and should finally bring the prices we all deserve. I hope your bottom line was the best ever.

The tree shortage (yes, there is a shortage) has also unfortunately led to somewhat of a seedling and transplant shortage. If you didn't get your order in last summer you may be out of luck come spring. Don't hesitate to reach out to our other members to look for a few hundred trees this spring, sometimes some of us over order and have no problem sharing. Another great thing about our membership.

If you haven't yet priced your spring fertilizer order you may be in shock. The ton and a half I order each spring has DOUBLED in price. Roundup and other herbicides will be in short supply and very expensive. Fuel prices are up, labor is up, insurance is up and pretty much everything we all use has been hit hard with the recent inflation. Keep this all in mind when you set your prices. We raised ours last year and heard some whining but sold what we wanted to.

continued on page 2

Avoiding Mistakes in Shearing Canaan Firs

By: Mim Dunne, *Woodsedge Tree Farm*

After shearing Canaan firs for about 15 years and 2 rotations on our 6 acres of trees, I recognize that mistakes made early on leave a legacy of problems. I am by no means an expert on shearing, but wanted to relate some experiences and share information from experts in this article.

My shearing education began at Penn State at the Christmas Tree Grower School. We've also had some great speakers at the NJCTGA meetings such as Larry Downey from Quebec, and other growers including those in our association. This winter I searched the internet and found a great resource in Jeff Owen from NC State. His comprehensive article can be found here ([Shaping Fraser Fir Christmas Trees \(ncsu.edu\)](https://www.ncsu.edu/shaping-fraser-fir-christmas-trees)).

I wondered if the principles of shearing Frasers applied to Canaans, and Jeff gave me a solid "maybe". When Canaans look and act like Frasers – thrifty form with slow growing leaders and branches – they can be treated like Frasers when shearing. Other Canaans behave more like Balsam firs, so growers should consider recommendations for shearing Balsams as fitting for Canaans.

As with many aspects of growing Christmas trees, there is science, and then there is art and customer needs and preferences. All should be taken into consideration in a shearing system.

Timing: When to start shearing young trees

We have always sheared for fullness and density vs. lengthening trees for accelerated growth. We have tended to overcut the terminal so that the tree does not become too leggy. This results in a slow



growing but dense tree. A better result may be leaving the "natural bud" at the top of the terminal uncut as long as possible – until it gets longer than 12" when the tree is 2-3' tall. Multiple leaders should be cut out, and branches can be tipped to set the taper of the tree. Leaving that natural bud intact preserves the plant growth hormones (PGH) that keep multiple leaders from arising. PGH also suppresses the "horns" that arise from branches – the unwanted branches that try to be terminals. Left uncut, the horns give the tree a top-heavy and unbalanced look.

If you are not touching the terminals on small trees (5' and smaller), you can begin your seasonal shearing of them the earliest of your plantation, mid-July here in Warren County. According to NCSU's Jeff Owen, you do not need to wait until the growth has totally hardened off.

This is also a good stage to do basal pruning to help develop a handle on each tree. Eliminating that lower whorl of branches helps with air flow around the base of the tree. It also facilitates our backpack spraying of herbicides and basal bark spraying for scale. Basal pruning may need to be re-

continued on page 4

farmers Against Hunger



Farmers Against Hunger and the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association

By: Lynn Flannery

We are so grateful for the NJCTGA and all of the farms who so generously support our mission and our fundraising efforts. We are thrilled to report that this year approximately \$5,000 has been raised by NJ Christmas Tree Farms. This approximate 67% increase over 2020 is due in part to the successful "nearest dollar roundup program" kicked off by Evergreen Valley Christmas Tree Farm.

The **Farmers Against Hunger** (FAH) program is in its 25th year of operation and was started by NJ farmers who sought to contribute their extra produce to those in need. FAH helps to reduce the impact of food insecurity, lack of access to healthy food, and inequitable distribution of food across certain populations and geographic regions. Today, FAH has over 120 farm partners, in addition to grocery store and wholesale partners, whose support helps to meet the needs of the food insecure in 18 of NJ's 21 counties. Food from our partners is delivered to approximately 85 community hunger relief organizations that then distribute directly to those in need.

According to the Community FoodBank of New Jersey Special Re-

port (9/30/20), entitled *COVID-19's Impact on Food Insecurity in New Jersey*: "New Jersey is projected to experience a 56 percent increase in the number of food-insecure residents. This projected increase is 10 percentage points greater than the estimates for the nation overall, and considerably higher than neighboring states – 11 percentage points more than estimated for Pennsylvania and New York, and 15 percentage points more than Delaware. In raw numbers, this mean that more than 1.2 million New Jersey residents, or 13.5 percent, are projected to be food insecure.... This is an increase of approximately 431,000 New Jerseyans, including 165,000 children.

Because of our years of experience, our volunteers, our farms and resources such as our trucks, Farmers Against Hunger has been able to respond to the increase in need these past couple of years. The money raised by our partners helps us keep the trucks on the road, continue our mission successfully and respond in crisis.

THANK YOU to the Christmas Tree Growers and the Association for all that you do to make our holidays joyous in so many ways. Wishing you a safe, healthy and happy 2022!



President's Message continued from page 1

Our winter meeting was cancelled due to the Omicron outbreak. We had worked very hard to put together a really good agenda but our speakers will all be back next year. We tried our best but cancelling the meeting was really the only choice we had.

If you haven't yet sent in your dues for this year please do so as soon as you can.

It makes life much easier for Donna Cole. Should you have any questions or suggestions Donna or I are always available.

I received many calls from the media this past season about the tree shortage. Many years of being the President has taught me to be very cautious in representing our industry here in NJ. I always put a positive spin on everything, even though most of

the time the media wants to talk about lanternfly populations or tree shortages. My tree shortage reply was always the same: There's no shortage on our farms!!! Let that be the case. Plant more trees this spring than you ever have, you cant sell them if you don't have them. Good luck this year to all of you.

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Contact Donna Cole, Exec. Secretary, at (908) 735-4658 or email execsecretary@njchristmastrees.org

DESIGNED AT ROWAN COLLEGE AT BURLINGTON COUNTY



Grower's Spotlight:

OTTERBEIN FARMS, SOMERSET

By: Tim Dunne



Tim Dunne

Jack Otterbein graduated from Rutgers University with a degree in Landscape Architecture in the mid 1970's, and has run a successful nursery and landscape business at his Somerset County site since that time. He began growing and selling Christmas trees about 30 years ago. It keeps him very busy now as the nursery and landscape business is slowing down as Jack thinks about retirement. Otterbein Farms in Somerset, NJ is located

in between New Brunswick and Princeton and sells hundreds of Christmas trees in these NJ towns, but also to customers as far away as New York City.

The 12 acre operation is run largely by Jack himself all year. His daughter Katie, son Eric, and daughter-in-law Cara all help at the farm during Christmas tree sales season. Jack grows concolor fir (his favorite), Fraser fir, Norway spruce, blue spruce and white spruce. Blue spruce at



Snowy aerial drone photo of Otterbein Farms in Somerset, NJ



Concolor fir at sunset at Otterbein Farms

one time was the most popular tree he grew and sold, but times have changed and they are now only a minor part of the tree farm. The farm sells beautiful wreaths and grave blankets that are made on the farm during the Christmas season. Wreaths are made the old fashion way – with greens wired on to double wreath rings. No wreath machine at Otterbein Farms. They also make custom white pine roping by special order only, from white pines they grow.

The farm began taking Venmo payments this year, and it has been a success, especially with younger families. For those of you who are not savvy (like me!) to today's apps and such, Venmo is a payment app available on iPhones and Android phones that allows for the quick and easy exchange of money directly between two parties. His kids help him set it up for the farm during Christmas tree season as things like Venmo are second nature to this younger generation.

Jack has been an NJCTGA member for about 10 years and loves the organization. He enjoys "meeting other growers, comparing notes and learning what works for them". Jack commented on the recent virtual winter meeting and thought it was a great way to still have a meeting when in-person events are not possible. Jack thinks "Zoom meetings are part of the future of education for growers". He might save hours driving to a meeting when he can hear speakers from his home. He still prefers in person meetings where he can see demonstrations and meet and talk with other growers. Another benefit of attending NJCTGA meetings, including Zoom meetings, is a chance to win great door prizes. Jack was the winner of a Stihl 170 chainsaw at the January annual winter meeting on Zoom.

I asked Jack about any advice he would have for other growers, something that has worked well for him. He paused, thought about it for a minute and said "be pleasant to your customers, especially the cranky ones". We then had a long discussion, trading stories about interaction with customers over the years. It was great to trade experiences with Jack and I think being pleasant comes natural to him.



Snowy field of young trees behind a polywire fence



Antique Willy's Jeep and the farm's dog all decked out for Christmas

Shearing Canaan Firs *continued from page 1*

peated as the trees get larger, but we prefer to wait until just before harvest, and use that material for wreath making. The caveat here is to not shear these lowest branches the year they will be basal pruned for the best looking brush for wreaths.

Timing of shearing larger trees: Keepers vs Market trees

After the small trees are done, and the growth has hardened off in the bigger trees, it is time to prune out competing terminals and shear sides. "Keeper" trees—those 6' and under that won't be sold this season—should be done first to give the trees the most time to set buds for the next growing season. For us, this is actually a 3-stage process (after Larry Downey of Quebec). Multiple tops should be taken out first, as well as trimming of the first whorl, or laterals. Multiple tops include any branches that are more than 45 degrees near the terminal. Laterals should be cut half as long as the terminal. Left too long and the tree loses its taper, too short and the result might be unwanted horns and branches that cross-over into the tree's interior. We have also started to thin out some of the branches below the top whorl to lighten a dense top in a keeper tree.

The sides should be done next. We shear keeper trees with a rotary trimmer, and tend to go tight. Too tight and there are no buds left for next year's growth, and the result is a hole, or "cat's eye." A tight shear promotes a full tree, again a preference but not the only way to shear. Some

customers prefer a more open tree, with lots of holes to hang ornaments. A tightly sheared keeper tree can be lightly sheared the year it is a market tree.

Ideally the tops of keepers are left until later summer. Choosing the length of the terminal leader is an ongoing discussion on our farm. We settle on 12-14" for keepers. You want to choose a terminal bud that is an inch or so above others so that it will be dominant. The cut is made about .25" above the bud, and the angle is 45 degrees in the direction opposite the bud. This helps to pull the shoot upright next year. We've also rubbed out competing buds around the one we want to favor.

All shearing should be completed by September. Shearing too late into the fall results in poor bud set for the next growing season.

Market trees are the ones we expect to sell that season. Hopefully at this point (7' and up), they do not need more than a light trim at the terminal and top whorl. This can be done after all the keeper trees are done, since bud set for next year is not a worry. Market trees get sheared with hand shears, or with the rotary trimmer, but in either case it is a light touch. The length of the terminal can be a little shorter than keeper trees and cutting above a bud is not so important.

Other considerations

Issues with tops arise in trees of all sizes, whether it is birds destroying leaders, frost, or other issues. We tie up tops with

anything handy – flagging tape, bitter-sweet vines, a plant-tying tapener, and a bamboo or other stake. The most success comes from tying up succulent, unhardened growth. When a top gets destroyed and a new one needs to be encouraged, it is important to cut back the laterals around the new leader so that new horns don't arise and try to out-compete. The tied-up top can be set free after just a few weeks so the tie doesn't hurt the stem.

Customer preferences are always top of mind for us when shaping trees. We look at each tree when shearing and work with its tendencies. We tend to give it a light touch if it is Fraser-like in its form. We find that many customers want this type of skinny, open tree which we think of as "Victorian," or "old-fashioned." Our Canaans tend to be full and densely growing, which is also appreciated by customers. It is important to us that our trees all look good, but are not necessarily uniform in their character.

With some trees, the legacy of problems is too great to overcome with shearing, and no amount of TLC will produce a marketable product. In those cases, we neglect the tree all together and cut it out for wreath material before the tree selling season begins.

References

[Shearing_UNH.pdf](#)
[shaping-fraser-fir-christmas-trees_NC.pdf](#)



This Canaan has a few horns that need to come out as well as a branch in the top whorl that is growing >45 degrees on the stem.



Multiple tops in a Canaan – need to cut out a leader and thin some branches in the upper whorls.



"Lammas" growth on a terminal that may have been cut too early. The shoot on the left should be cut out to prevent a competing terminal from arising next growing season.



A "natural bud" on the terminal of a 4-5' Canaan will not be cut. Growth hormones are keeping multiple terminals and "horns" in check.

Penn State Researchers Aim to Debunk Myths Surrounding Spotted Lanternfly

By: Rachel McDevitt

Researchers at Penn State are trying to set the record straight about the invasive spotted lanternfly. “The early lack of understanding about the spotted lanternfly, coupled with frustration, has led to the sharing of erroneous information, especially on social media,” said Julie Urban, associate research professor of entomology at Penn State. Some misconceptions about the spotted lanternfly came as a result of misunderstandings about the bug soon after it was discovered in Berks County in 2014.

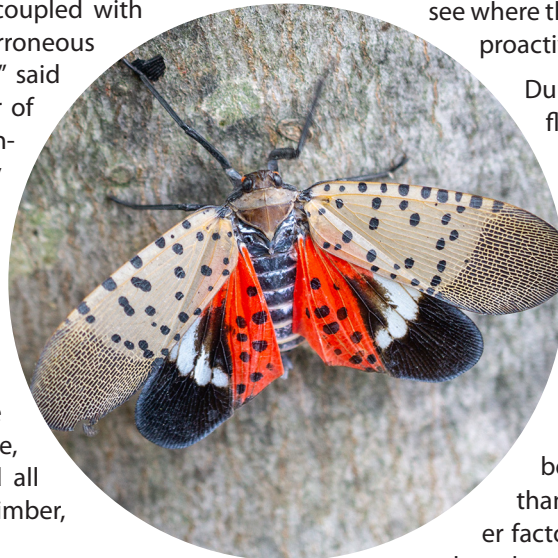
Urban said early guidance was based on information about how the lanternfly affected crops in South Korea—where it is also invasive—but its impacts in the commonwealth are different. For example, scientists initially believed it threatened all kinds of plants, including trees used for timber, an important industry in the state.

But while lanternflies can stress trees, it appears they only kill grapevines and tree of heaven, also an invasive species, directly by feeding on them. “A stressed tree may be more susceptible to other stressors such as disease, other insect pests or drought,” said Kelli Hoover, also a professor of entomology. She added that young trees are more likely to experience significant stress from spotted lanternfly feeding than mature trees. Researchers noted the businesses feeling economic effects from the lanternflies are the ones that transport goods out of quarantine zones. They have to inspect vehicles and products to make sure they aren’t giving a ride to the hitchhiking lanternflies.

Urban said she’s seen a rise in home remedies, such as a mixture of dish soap and water, to try to control lanternflies, but some of those methods could cause unintended harm to native insects. “If you’re going to apply some type of product, don’t use any-

thing that isn’t labeled for lanternfly pest control,” Urban said.

When spraying for lanternflies, Urban said it’s best to wait and see where they concentrate, rather than trying to spray proactively.



During the winter, people can look for lanternfly egg masses on trees, cars, buildings, and other surfaces and destroy the masses by scraping and crushing them. Urban said egg masses look like small smears of mud from a distance; close up, they contain neat, vertical rows of eggs about the size of caraway seeds.

Horticulture extension educator Emelie Swackhamer said some might believe efforts to eradicate the bug are working, because they saw fewer lanternflies last year than in previous ones. But there are likely other factors at work. “We believe they leave an area when they have depleted their food source and need to find a better one,” Swackhamer said. Urban noted the bugs move around during their lifecycle. “You can see its range is expanding, and so to me and the rest of us, that suggests it’s not the time to rejoice that populations are crashing,” Urban said.

Urban said she’s surprised that the myth that lanternflies are harmful to people or pets continues to pop up on social media. She said they don’t bite, and they don’t contain a toxin found in other insects. Some have reported animals being sick after eating lanternflies. Urban said that’s likely because the lanternflies’ exoskeletons make them difficult to digest.

Urban said guidance on the lanternflies may change as more is learned about the invasive insect. People can follow the latest on the flies at Penn State Extension’s website: <https://extension.psu.edu/spotted-lanternfly>.

Annual Winter Meeting Recap

We had a great in-person winter meeting planned for January 29, 2022 at the Rutgers EcoComplex in Columbus, NJ. A few weeks prior to the meeting, Rutgers informed us that the facility was now closed and we could not have our meeting there due to the recent Covid Omicron surge. We scrambled and discussed postponing the meeting, moving to a different facility and finally decided to go with a virtual meeting using the now popular Zoom platform. While these types of meetings are no comparison to an in-person meeting, it did allow us to have two speakers

and to provide valuable pesticide license credits to our members during the 90 minute Zoom meeting.

One of our scheduled speakers, Tim Waller of Rutgers Cumberland County Cooperative Extension Service, stepped forward and planned the whole event. He offered up the Rutgers Zoom platform that would host the meeting. He organized on-line registration which required our members to provide identification and pesticide license information.

We had Tim give a talk on Phytophthora

issues with Christmas trees and his work looking for Phytophthora on Christmas tree farms. That was followed by a pesticide safety and regulations presentation by Dr. George Hamilton of Rutgers. The meeting concluded with Executive Secretary Donna Cole awarding a chainsaw door prize, as we do at every annual winter meeting. Donna had a list of all of the Zoom meeting participants. She made slips of paper with all members’ names and pulled one out of a hat. Member Jack Otterbein of Somerset, NJ is now the proud owner of a brand new Stihl 170 chainsaw.

NCTA Mission Statement:

To protect and advocate for the farm-grown Christmas tree industry.

What Your NJCTGA Association Does for You

During this trying time of the Covid Pandemic, the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association has had to cancel several in-person meetings. These meetings are the main way we historically provide education and information to our members by inviting University professors, industry leaders, and experienced growers to make presentations and answer questions from members.

But this is not all your association does. We provide four newsletters annually providing similar information. We react to any negative press about our industry such as the "lanternflies in Christmas trees" rumors in 2019 and tree shortage rumors in 2021. In January, after our annual winter meeting was cancelled since a Covid surge closed our Rutgers facility, NJCTGA held its first ever virtual meeting on Zoom. While this meeting did not provide the same flavor as an in-person meeting it was successful according to most of the 20+ members who tuned in. The meeting lasted about 90 minutes with two knowledgeable speakers, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Agent Tim Waller and Rutgers Pest Management Specialist George Ham-

ilton providing information on current important topics. In addition the members who registered and watched the Zoom meeting will receive continuing education credits towards their pesticide licenses. We also provided a door prize of a Stihl 170 chainsaw. Ironically, with the heavy snow over parts of New Jersey on January 29, had we had an in-person meeting that day, we may have cancelled it due to weather conditions.

We have many costs to keep the Association running. Salary for an Executive Secretary, fees to keep our website up to date and running smoothly, newsletter production costs, office supplies, and donations to several ag related organizations annually. We hope to resume regular meetings this summer with a twilight meeting in June, a summer meeting in August or September and a annual winter meeting in person in January 2023. For about the price of one tree you sell in December, you can be an annual member of NJCTGA. This is a small price to pay to support your NJCTGA. You should have received a dues notice recently, thank you to those who have already paid their dues.



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If possible, ads should be submitted in PDF format. Contact Exec. Secretary Donna Cole for additional details.

N J C H R I S T M A S T R E E S . O R G

News from the Christmas Tree Promotion Board

Whew! Taking a Look at the 2021 Season

This is the time of year when Christmas tree producers wrap up details from the past season and begin prep for spring planting. Part of that wrap up is taking time to reflect on the past season. Did it meet your expectations? How did you handle those curveballs?

The CTPB is no different. In January, we review how the campaign performed and dig deep into the numbers of reach and results. This week the board will receive detailed presentations from our advertising and public relations firms and have the opportunity to ask questions of both.

The following week, the CTPB plans to post the annual Campaign Summary Video on the website so all industry members can view the “highlights” of the work done on your behalf. The availability of the video will also be announced via email, so watch for that. In the meantime, you can spend a little time on the consumer website to see what was shared with consumers.

<https://itschristmaskeepitreal.com/>

The final way that the CTPB can engage with growers and share this information is participation in state and regional meetings. CTPB will be presenting at the following meetings and hope to see many of you in attendance: Wisconsin, Indiana/Illinois, Pacific Northwest, North Carolina, Ohio and Michigan. There are several other meetings that are still in flux based on COVID concerns and the CTPB is hoping to add several more opportunities – even if it means participating electronically.

Take a Look! 2021 Campaign Video Ready to View

Every year the CTPB shares the annual Campaign Summary Video on the website so all industry members can view the “highlights” of the work done on your behalf. And we are happy to announce that the video is now available!

The link below takes you to a page where you can watch the campaign summary video, as well as other videos from the campaign; The Holderness Family, Dude Dad, Satellite Media Tour samples, Converts videos and Media stories.

This is a fast way to get a quick update on how CTPB is promoting fresh Christmas trees.

<https://itschristmaskeepitreal.com/2021-video-content/>



Shearing Equipment



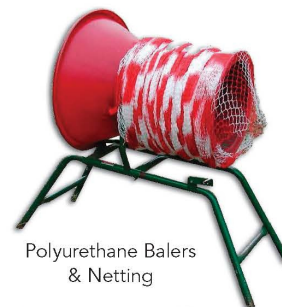
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