Recycling Holiday Greenery

By Valerie Jean Rose
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For most families who celebrate Christmas, the tree is like a family member who always comes home for the holidays. Does this season's tree look like those from your childhood memories?   What kind of trees and decorations did your family choose and cherish? I remember my father cutting one of the many blue spruces we'd planted for wildlife habitat on the family farm. I'd help carry the aromatic tree into the house, moving furniture to create its proud place in the living room.

At first our cats were confused then delighted to have something new to climb and attack. The ornaments completed their playground. We soon learned to hang the delicate ones up high, with sturdy wood or unbreakable plastic pieces dangling from the lowest branches on the tree. In spite of these precautions, my Christmas tree memories include sweeping up broken globes and trying to repair fragmented "cat toys."

Not everyone has a Christmas tree as large as this one in Sedro-Woolley, shown Dec. 3 during the annual Christmas Parade and tree-lighting ceremony. Big trees can be recycled after the holidays by sawing them into firewood for the fireplace or wood stove. Be sure to let the wood dry a season before burning.

But my earliest Christmas tree memories come from family gatherings in the city. My Uncle Gil and Aunt Helen hosted the Christmas Eve celebration in their apartment. Their tree was always captivating, with branches glowing green – then blue, followed by red and yellow, then back to green. This psychedelic specimen was an artificial "tree," lit by a spotlight glowing through a rotating circle of colored plastic. For hours the kaleidoscopic flow of blue, red, yellow and green washed through the aluminum "branches." Barbie dolls and wooden train cars became blue-skinned monsters and flaming rockets, as my cousins and I held our toys in the color wheel's glow. This seasonal show ended in late December when Uncle Gil unplugged the light and dismantled the "tree," packing them away for another year.

If Uncle Gil and Aunt Helen lived in Skagit County, and their aluminum tree was worn and broken, they'd have to put it in the garbage, where it would be taken by train 360 miles south, to a landfill in the small town of Roosevelt, on the Columbia River. Aluminum cans are prime recycling material, but not aluminum pie plates or metal Christmas trees. Now if they had a real tree, without flocking or fire retardant, they would have many ways to ensure their greenery was chipped and composted, returning the greenery to the soil.

Justin Frederick (left), who attends Mount Vernon High School, and Sedro-Woolley High School student Brady Grieve, both 17, carry a noble fir Saturday, Dec. 3, that was cut and sold as a Christmas tree to benefit Friendship House. Unflocked Christmas trees and other greenery can be recycled for free at many facilities in Skagit County.

Tree Recycling Options in Rural Skagit County:

DIY (Do It Yourself)

Trees without flocking or fire retardant can be sawed into logs for a fireplace or wood stove. Let logs dry and season before burning. If you have land, put your tree outside to compost.

Skagit Soils

Drop off your tree and other greenery at this commercial composting facility, 16260 Ball Road, west of Burlington, next to the Recycling and Transfer Station on Ovenell Road. No charge for trees/greenery: both must be without flocking, metal or ornaments. Hours open: Monday - Friday 8 AM – 4:30 PM, Saturday 9 AM – 2 PM. Closed December 24, 25, 31 and January 1. For more information call 424-0199 or go online to http://skagitsoilsinc.com/5073.html.

Skagit County Recycling and Transfer Station, 14014 Ovenell Road location only

No tree or greenery disposal at Sauk or Clear Lake Transfer Stations. Ovenell Road location accepts trees and greenery that are without flocking, ornaments or metal. Minimum $10.00 fee for the first 200 pounds – bring additional non-recyclable waste to make the 200 pound minimum. No charge for recyclable materials (bottles, cans, etc.) Open daily 8:30 AM – 6 PM, including county furlough days – but closed December 25 and January 1. For more information call 424-7817 or go online to www.skagitcounty.net/Common/Asp/Default.asp?d=PublicWorksSolidWaste&c=General&p=main.htm .

Curbside Yard Waste Pickup – Shelter Bay Residents

Shelter Bay is still the only area in unincorporated Skagit County with Waste Management's curbside Food and Yard Waste pickup. Remove ornaments, put tree/greenery in green bin. For more information call Waste Management at 1-800-592-9995 or go online to www.wmnorthwest.com/skagitcounty/service.html#yardwaste .

Options for City Residents:

If you live in Anacortes, Burlington, Mount Vernon or Sedro-Woolley and have curbside Yard Waste Collection, remove ornaments and put tree in green bin. For more information contact Waste Management (see Shelter Bay listing.)

Anacortes

The Kiwanas and Anacortes High School Key Club Christmas tree pickup returns on Saturday, January 7. No flocking, tinsel or wires. Have tree at curb by 8 AM along with a $5 cash and/or nonperishable food donation. If your tree is missed, call the Kiwanis Thrift Shop at 293-2921 on Saturday afternoon for a Sunday pickup. After January 7 call 293-1918 to arrange for collection.

Burlington

The City Shop, 951 S Section Street, accepts trees and greenery with no flocking or fire retardant. Remove ornaments, tinsel. Free self-serve disposal available 24/7 from Monday December 26 – January 25. Facility may be open later if bad weather causes delays. For more information call 757-3450.

Mount Vernon (East of I-5)

Boy Scout Troop 100 will pick up trees on Saturday, December 31 & Saturday, January 7. Have tree at curb by 7 AM. No set fee, donations appreciated. Information: 848-5275. For any questions on day of pickup call 421-4490.

Additional Option for Mount Vernon Residents

Mount Vernon's City Sanitation Yard takes trees and greenery. Flocked trees accepted but can't be composted. Remove metal and ornaments. Free. 401 W Fir Street on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays following Christmas, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM. For more information call 336-6218, 8 AM – 4:30 PM weekdays.

Sedro-Woolley (and surrounding urban growth areas)

From Tuesday December 27 through Friday, January 20, put tree and other greenery on the large evergreen pile at Sedro-Woolley's City Shop, Third and Sterling Streets, 7 AM – 2 PM, Monday - Friday. Remove ornaments, lights, tinsel or wire. Free. For more information call 855-1884.