



# THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

## Industry searches for a better tree

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

The Christmas tree industry has forced itself to evolve.

In less than a century, it's shifted from relying on forest byproducts to producing a highly specializing horticultural crop.

That doesn't mean the industry's transformation is complete.

"It's just a constant improvement that's still going on," said Ken Brown, a grower and former Oregon State University Extension specialist.

Farmers are becoming less reliant on seed collected from the wild and are instead planting seeds grown in dedicated orchards.

Rather than gamble on inherited traits, they're now shaping the genetics of Christmas trees by selecting the best specimens and allowing them to cross breed.

The breeding effort is a mix of private and public endeavors: Farmers have established their own seed orchards, as have universities such as OSU.

"More and more, we rely on seed orchards to get seed," said Cal Landgren, OSU Extension's tree specialist. "My motivation is to get the most seed out of the most trees to the most growers as widely as possible."

### 'Intriguing' crop

The prospect of refining a relatively new crop is precisely what drew Ken Brown to the Christmas tree industry several decades ago.

"It was something intriguing for me — just taking a wild tree and culturing it to make it into a good-looking Christmas tree," he said. "Growers are always experimenting on their cultural practices and we're always selecting better seed stock."

Production in the Pacific Northwest has long been dominated by Noble firs and Douglas firs, but the industry is increasingly interested in several species that originated along the coast of the Black Sea: Nordmann firs, Turkish firs, and most recently, Trojan firs.



Mateusz Perkowski  
Capital Press

Farmers presented Oregon State University officials with a 30-foot Christmas tree

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Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Cal Landgren, Oregon State University Extension Christmas tree specialist, examines a Trojan fir tree at the university's seed orchard in Aurora, Ore. The species is the most recent among several that originated near the Black Sea to draw attention from Northwest growers.

# Reindeer farm spreads Christmas cheer

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN  
Capital Press

Cindy Murdoch, 65, owner of Timberview Farm, stretched out her hand. "C'mere, silly," she said.

A reindeer wearing a red and green halter bearing the name "Comet" in white lettering stepped forward, allowing Murdoch to stroke its antlers.

When the average American thinks of reindeer, said Murdoch, they think of Santa Claus. Reindeer have been synonymous with Christmas since Clement C. Moore penned his famous poem, "A Visit

from Saint Nicholas," in 1823.

According to Michelle Dennehy, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman, this is Oregon's only permitted reindeer operation, a farm with nine licensed reindeer.

Because of the folklore surrounding flying reindeer, Murdoch said people are often surprised to learn that reindeer are real.

"Some people think they're like unicorns," said Murdoch. "They think they're fairytale creatures."

Experts say the species, though not magical, is remarkable.

The reindeer, a member of the Cervidae family of hoofed ruminant mammals, is a circumpolar species, meaning it lives in countries all around the arctic circle, according to the Smithsonian Institution.

Reindeer have been domesticated for millennia. According to a 2021 study in the Journal of Anthropological Archaeology, "reindeer herding has been culturally and economically important for many peoples."

The earliest known domestication, according to the Journal, can be traced



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Reindeer at Timberview Farm in Oregon.

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# Oregon grower keeps chestnut industry alive

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN  
Capital Press



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Carol Porter, 79, owner of Sweet Home Chestnut Farm, peels a chestnut.

SWEET HOME, Ore. — Carol Porter recalls sitting in a doctor's office in the mid-1980s, flipping through National Geographic, when she came across a story on chestnuts.

The article brought back childhood memories. Her parents, Italian immigrants, had exposed her to roasted chestnuts and sweetbreads made with chestnut flour when she was little. Porter said she wondered if she could plant an orchard.

It would be a big change of pace;



Sierra Dawn McClain  
Capital Press

Chestnuts from Sweet Home Chestnut Farm.

Porter, 79.

The couple settled in Sweet Home, Ore., where they started a grass-fed beef and pork operation

and, in the early 1990s, planted a chestnut orchard.

Today, Sweet Home Chestnut Farm is one of about 10 chestnut operations in the Northwest, keeping alive the tradition of "chestnuts roasting on an open fire."

According to Oregon State University's Extension Service, the hardwood American chestnut grew in vast stands across the continent when early settlers arrived. The chestnuts were a staple for both settlers and many wildlife species.

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