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### American Christmas tree statistics

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By Jack Ryan

The old family Christmas tree aint what it used to be, or words to that effect. American Christmas tree shoppers have gone from spruce to balsam to Douglas fir to pine, and in recent years a fellow with a sheet of aluminum and a tin snips has given the tree growers something to worry about.

According to George Blake, assistant professor of forestry at Montana State University, the end in style changes of Christmas trees is not yet in sight. One of the most recent developments is the "shaped" tree, a tree that has undergone careful trimming and shaping during its years of growth until it looks like something out of a decorative planting by the time its ready for market.

The Montana harvest of trees for the holidays was pretty well over before Thanksgiving, Blake said. One thing about the harvest that some people are not aware of is that many of the trees this year started out to be limbs. In a cutting process called "stump culture", a Douglas fir is lopped off with a branch or two remaining on the stump. One of these branches then becomes a leader and the tree grows a new top, ready for another harvest in from five to 15 years.

Blake said that Christmas tree farms near some of the larger cities have started the practice of urging people to come out and cut their own tree, somewhat in the ancient spirit of bringing in the yule log.

"Only angle the Christmas tree merchants haven't figured out yet is what to do with a tree on the day after Christmas, short of putting it in a nice, big bonfire," Blake said.

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