

For Information call: 321-633-1702

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sasc@ufl.edu

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Rosemary Christmas Trees

Sally Scalera

The holidays are a popular time to give plants as a gift. In the past, I have written articles on how to care for poinsettias, Christmas cactus and amaryllis after the holidays for years of continued enjoyment. This year though, the holiday gift plant I want to talk about is the large rosemary plants that are pruned like a Christmas tree.

I started noticing these plants in the garden centers last year around the holidays. They are so festive looking with their Christmas tree shape. Rosemary is definitely one of my favorite herbs because I love its fragrance and many uses. It is also pest and disease free.

Rosemary is a fantastic plant for Brevard because it is drought tolerant and fairly cold tolerant. We have had a rosemary bush in our back yard for the past four or five years now and it is one of the most drought tolerant plants around. Last winter we had both a frost and a light freeze and the rosemary did wonderfully. Rosemary can also handle the sandy soils that we naturally find in our yards.

Rosemary also has many uses. Its culinary uses are well known as it can be used for pork or lamb as well as in biscuits and anywhere else you want to use it! It is also a wonderful strewing herb which is where you strip the leaves off of the stems and throw them around on the carpet and then vacuum them up. For all of the stems and branches that you have left over, after your done cooking with them or strewing the leaves, there are a couple of great uses you can choose from. You can throw the stems on the hot charcoals in the grill to flavor your meat and vegetables or, you can throw them into your fire to give your room a little rosemary aromatherapy.

The fact that rosemary is drought tolerant can be either a positive or negative characteristic. The reason it can be negative is that rosemary doesn't give any indication when it is drying out until it is so dry that it is dead. This is the reason that so many of the rosemary Christmas trees that are purchased end up dieing fairly soon. I have even seen plants in the garden center where an entire side has died out and they are put on sale as early as Thanksgiving. Rosemary plants actually put out tiny, shallow, hair-like roots which insist on good drainage. On the flip side though, the plant can not tolerate being permitted to dry out because of a lack of water. Many plants have leaves that wilt so that you know you need to water them but the leaves of rosemary don't ever wilt so you don't get that very important warning.

When a rosemary Christmas tree is purchased it is usually a large plant in a small, it looks like less than a one gallon pot, container. That means that there is probably a pretty good size root mass with not much soil to hold onto the water. The more soil a container holds the longer the plant can go between watering.

For anyone who purchases or receives a rosemary Christmas tree this holiday here are some hints to help your plant survive for years.

- Replant your tree into a larger, preferably, clay pot. Add a lightweight, fast-draining potting mix and plant your new plant so that the top of the root ball is at the same level as the surrounding potting mix. Water the plant every week or two and make sure that a clay tray is below to catch the water that drains out. Keep the container near a bright window or outside in full sun.

- If you want to keep it in the original pot, for awhile, put a plate or clear tray underneath it and give it about a half of cup of water every few days but only let it sit in the tray of excess water for a couple of hours. Then pour out the excess water. Keep it near a sunny window or outside in full sun.
- A third option would be to plant your rosemary Christmas tree outside in full sun either immediately after you receive it or after the holidays. Before planting, place the container in a bowl and water it well so that the plant is sitting in the bowl of water for a half an hour or so. This will make sure that the root ball is totally saturated before being planted into the sandy soil. Next, just plant it in a sunny location and place mulch around the base of the plant. Water in the newly planted rosemary. If it is planted in sandy, well-draining soil and you have an irrigation system, the rosemary should do fine.

Rosemary is a wonderful shrub and culinary herb that makes a fantastic gift for the holidays. It's easy to grow and has no insect or disease problems so, if you like the little rosemary Christmas trees keep this article handy so that you can keep your rosemary growing for years of enjoyment.