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Branching out with Canada's Christmas tree industry

'Tis the Season.... The brightly-decorated Christmas tree — a silent but super star performer in the jollity surrounding the festive season — is also the basis of a fairly lucrative industry. This is true particularly in Atlantic Canada where some of the finest trees are cultivated and harvested for export to markets throughout North America and the Caribbean.

If the North Pole personifies St. Nick and his herd of high-flying reindeer, Atlantic Canada with its cool moist climate conjures up the image of the beautifully shaped aromatic Christmas tree.

Canada's Christmas tree industry, although limited to a brief, bright moment near the end of December, is a booming business that keeps tree growers on the hop most of the year. It brings in an annual \$8 million in exports.

As with everything else in life, the Christmas tree industry has its good news and its bad.

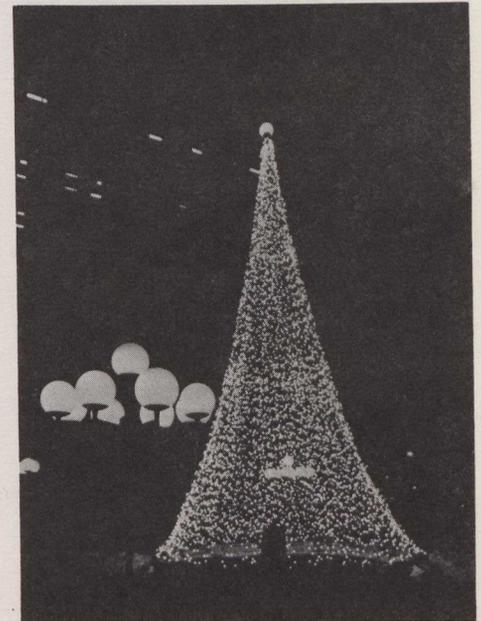
The United States is the top consumer of Canadian-produced trees — a fact that adds a challenge for Canadian tree growers. With the encouragement of US apartment by-laws, about 30 per cent of all US Christmas trees are now artificial, cutting a large slice out of the annual Canadian Christmas tree profits.

On the bright side there is a growing trend among young marrieds in their Twenties and Thirties to return to crafts and nature. When their thoughts turn to Yuletide, they gravitate to a tree that looks and smells like a Christmas tree should.

The trees are planted in the fall and spring. They come in various shapes, sizes and species — among them, white spruce, scotch, virginia and white pine, and from the fir family, fraser, white, noble and balsam.

Ecologists who might worry about forest regeneration need not give a thought to the felling of Christmas trees. They are planted for one purpose — to yield a harvest that can be sold like any other crop.

Atlantic Canada's Christmas tree crop covers less than 40 470 hectares — about



To millions, the Christmas tree, real or artificial, is a symbol of Christmas.

one-tenth of 1 per cent of the forested land in the Atlantic provinces, not including Labrador. Much of the land is made up of abandoned fields or cut-over forests that were often a jumble of weeds. Cultivation of continuous crops of trees help to improve the quality of the soil, and man-made ponds add protection against fire.

From late October to early December, the Christmas tree grower is fully occupied with the harvest. Before the cutting, trees are selected and marked. After they are felled, they are baled, loaded and delivered to buyers. For ease and speed of handling, protection against breakage and for saving space in transit, trees are usually compressed by some type of baling operation before being shipped long distances.

Nova Scotia is justifiably proud of its



SEASON'S GREETINGS



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