

## Her Green Acres Are Santa's Branch Office

HAPPY HOLIDAYS *do* grow on trees...at least on Ginger Ahl's family evergreen farm near Merrillan, Wisconsin.

"As wholesale growers, we harvest and deliver around 180,000 Christmas trees to retailers every year," she says. "They end up in homes across the United States and in Canada and Puerto Rico as well."

Brought up on a tree farm, Ginger chuckles, "I guess I must have evergreen sap in my blood!" She and her husband, John, are partners with her parents—Arlene and Cal Frelk—in Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery.

"Our work keeps us in the holiday spirit year-round," she notes. "In spring, we're planting new stock. Summer's the time to shear our crop into pretty symmetry."

Specializing in seven evergreen species, Ginger and John have something "fir" everyone.

"Our Scotch pines are the most popular of all, with their sturdy branches to hold ornaments," she informs. "White pines sell well among allergy sufferers since they seldom cause reactions. And the Fraser fir with its beautiful shape and color is dubbed the 'Cadillac of Christmas trees.'"

It isn't known for its speed, however. Generally, Christmas trees take from 8 to 15 years to reach their preferred height of 6 to 8 feet. Trees that measure up by the November harvest are destined to be "star material" in December.

Frequently, Ginger explains the prickly process to school groups and seniors who visit on festive field trips. She likes to point out to them, "Actually, Christmas trees are a gift to our environment. A renewable crop, they provide oxygen to us and create homes for all kinds of wildlife."

Over the years, the clan's sharpest Christmas trees have been in heady holiday company—gracing Wisconsin's Capitol, for instance, and cheering a past President in the White House. "Still," Ginger observes, "supplying a tree for a typical family like ours is most gratifying."

Indeed, no matter how busy the season gets, the Ahls are sure to make time for the centerpiece of their celebration.

"Picking out and trimming a real Christmas tree," Ginger smiles as Ashley, 18, Lindsey, 14, and Derek, 9, drape branches with glittering tinsel, "has been a tradition since our kids were little." Of course, it's always the *perfect* one!



**YULE FUEL** is what Ginger Ahl (sizing up a Christmas candidate below) helps supply. With Ginger below right is her mom, who's a part of the family tree-growing operation.

