

# G R O W E R P R O F I L E

## At Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery, Growing Quality Trees Is a Family Tradition

Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery, headquartered in Merrillan, Wisconsin, cultivates over 6,000 acres of hardy nursery stock and Christmas trees—which they ship to retail garden centers and landscape contractors all over the country as well as to Canada and Puerto Rico.

In addition to Christmas trees, Northern has over 100,000 container-grown shade trees in production, along with a complete selection of container-grown shrubs and evergreens and large B&B evergreens. But like the Christmas trees they sell, the nursery did not grow to its present size overnight.

“The nursery was started by my father and his brother in the early 1950s,” says Ginger Ahl who, along with her husband John, joined the nursery in 1980 and became partners in the business in 1995. “In those days they had 450 acres of land and they were growing tomatoes on a contract basis for Campbell Soup. That was in northern Illinois.

“In 1955, they purchased 500 acres here in Jackson County, Wisconsin, to grow Scotch pine and Norway pine. That was the start of the Christmas tree part of our business. The business has been growing ever since.”



*Cold frames help protect Northern's crops from Wisconsin's winters.*

### New varieties, new techniques.

As the business grew, more acreage was acquired and new varieties were added. Today, Northern has farms in Jackson, Clark, Eau Claire, Monroe and Trempealeau counties (Wisconsin) where they grow over three million trees. The nursery's current Christmas tree production consists of approximately 30% Scotch pine, 25% Fraser fir, 25% White pine, 15% Balsam fir and 10% others, such as Colorado Blue spruce, White spruce, Concolor fir and Canaan fir.

Northern has also made quite a few changes in the way they harvest and handle their Christmas trees. In the nursery's early days, trees were tied with hand balers and then loaded by hand onto trucks. Today, the nursery uses a wide variety of custom designed equipment—such as net balers, hydraulic shaking machines, fertilizer spreaders, and field loading elevators—to harvest their Christmas trees and transport them to the loading yards.

Northern is equally efficient when it comes to getting its products to market. Since they own their own trailers, they can preload them and have them ready to go when the truckers arrive. This way, the drivers spend their time making deliveries, not waiting around in the loading yard.



*Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery is headquartered in Merrillan, Wisconsin.*



*Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery produces over 160 container grown varieties which are prized for their hardiness and beauty.*

### Northern today.

Today, Northern Christmas Trees & Nursery is one of the Midwest's largest not-in-a-pot deciduous tree growth,” says John Ahl. “There was no way to container grow without some form of root protection—which was costly and time consuming. With pot-in-pot, we get the root protection we need with no additional root protection measures required.”

Over 160 container-grown varieties are available and transplant-ready at Northern throughout the growing season. In addition, the nursery has over 20,000 linear feet of cold frames, eight heated greenhouses, and 700 acres under irrigation.

“We have a lot of state-of-the-art systems in place here,” says John. “For example, there's our fertilizer injected pivot irrigation system. That system was costly to purchase and install. But it has proven to be a real time saver compared to manual labor for fertilizer application.”

To keep the office running smoothly, Northern uses advanced technology in that department, too—including an electronic data information system. Through this system, financial information and funds are electronically transferred including purchase orders, invoices and payments. “Our major accounts have this technology,” says Ginger. “And it was important for us to have it, too.”

In spite of all its advanced technology, Northern prides itself on being a down-to-earth, family business. “When customers call here, they can always talk to the owners without having to go through several levels of

management,” says Ginger. “And we believe our emphasis on personal attention has been a key factor in our success.”

[www.northernchristmastrees.com](http://www.northernchristmastrees.com)



### REAL CHRISTMAS TREES ARE A GIFT TO THE PLANET

In addition to gladdening the hearts of millions, real Christmas trees provide many other benefits which are often taken for granted.

As nature's “air conditioners,” trees remove excessive carbon dioxide from the air and replace it with clean, healthy oxygen. It is estimated that with approximately one million acres of Christmas trees in production, this provides enough oxygen for eighteen million people per day.

Christmas trees are very adaptable and can be grown in marginal lands that are unsuitable for other crops. They also create scenic green belts, decrease land erosion, protect water supplies and provide refuge for wildlife.

Best of all, they're completely recyclable. They can be chipped and used as mulch for a whole new generation of trees!