

Tree cutting, ergonomically

This month, many of us are embarking on a physical activity for which we have little or no training; we'll be heading into the woods to cut down a tree.

We thought we'd share some "ergonomics" insights with you. (Perhaps you use an artificial tree, or you buy from a tree lot, or you don't have a tree at all. Bear with me as I describe the process of cutting your tree. Perhaps you'll be able to apply these tips the next time you need to chop down an overgrown hedge. And if you've already cut your tree, bookmark this page for earlier next December!)

Ergo tips for tree-cutting:

1. Stand where the tree will go in your home, and reach upward with your hand to **gauge how tall you want your tree to be**. The height of your raised hand? The height that your 4-year-old can reach while riding your shoulders? Of course, you can always use a tape measure...
2. Before you leave the house, **clear a path** between the door and the tree stand. Make the space around the tree stand much wider than the tree will be, so you'll have ample space for decorating. You'll be thankful you did this in advance.
3. Dress for the weather. In fact, dress on the assumption that you'll be lying on the ground, face down. Choose a waterproof jacket, and warm boots, pants, gloves, and hat. (Don't be like "that guy" in the photo. 😊)
4. **Bring a sled and ropes or bungees** to tie down your tree (or visit a tree farm that provides these). If it's muddy, choose a cart with big wheels. The walk into the woods is pleasant enough without the sled, but dragging a tree out of the woods gets tiring quickly.
5. **Choose a sharp saw**. A bow saw, or a pruning saw, will work. You may be surprised by how difficult it is to push and pull on a saw while you're lying down. (December should be lumberjack appreciation month!)
6. **Cut the tree horizontally** along the bottom. If you get it right in the tree lot, you won't have to re-cut the tree when you get home.
7. **Pulling is easier than carrying**. Load the tree onto your sled, tie it down securely, and tow it to the checkout.
8. If your tree farm offers the option to **"bag" or wrap the tree**, a bagged tree is less messy during transport and is easier to rope to the roof of your vehicle. (But the ergonomics of the bagging process is another question....As an ergonomist, it was hard to watch two people exert maximum effort to pull our tree through this bagging device.)



A lot can be said for the "ergonomics" of artificial trees; you can buy trees that are already lit and ready to plug in. But even artificial trees have to be manually handled. When carrying boxes up and downstairs, use "ergonomic" lifting practices:

- **Clear a path** before you start; tripping up or down the stairs while carrying a box of decorations won't start your season off on the right foot.
- **Test the load** before lifting so you can be prepared for heavy or unbalanced loads.
- **Get help** for items that are too heavy for one person. (Shouldn't decorating be a family/team activity?)
- **Avoid carrying stacks of items** that obstruct your view, especially on stairs.
- **Get a good grip**...plastic totes with handles will be easier to carry than cardboard boxes!

(Originally published on December 17, 2021 at www.taylordergo.com/blog)

