



Fir Fires

It isn't only for visual reasons that nobody wants to buy an old, dry Christmas tree - it can be an incendiary device. Most trees are cut sometime in November and then stand in overheated living rooms for a month or more. Fortunately, with the proper care, Christmas trees can stay green long after they're cut:

- Choose a fresh tree - Look for a vibrant green color and flexible needles that don't snap off easily (unless they're frozen). When you bounce or shake the tree, or run your hand over a branch, only a few needles should fall off. The sap on the trunk butt should be sticky.
- Water it frequently - Mount the tree in a sturdy, nontip stand that holds water, which you should refill daily or as needed. Before mounting it, cut an inch or two off the bottom so that it can absorb the water more easily.
- Place it far from heaters and the fire place - Fasten a large tree to walls or the ceiling.
- Light it right - don't put candles on or near a tree. Use only electric lights approved by UL. Check lights for cracked sockets, frayed wires, and loose connections. Turn off all lights - on the tree and elsewhere - when you leave the house or go to bed.
- Use noncombustible trimmings - Don't dress the tree with cotton batting (unless treated with flame retardant) or cellophane, which are highly flammable.
- Discard the tree promptly after the holiday before it dries out. A disproportionate share of Christmas tree fires occur in January, when the trees are older and drier.

Another option is to use a live potted tree-in the long term this will probably be cheaper and certainly more conservative.

Holiday Edibles by Mail

When receiving a gift by mail:

- If it was frozen when shipped, raw, cooked, or smoked meat, poultry and fish should arrive frozen or at least hard in the middle. If never frozen, it should be firm and cold-at or below 40 degrees F. The same is true for canned or processed foods (including most vacuum-packed foods) labeled "keep refrigerated." Baked hams (except dry-cured hams) should arrive cold. Many canned hams must be kept cold even when unopened because they are only pasteurized and not sterile; their labels say "keep refrigerated."
- Cheese should have no mold-unless, like Roquefort, it is supposed to. If mold has grown, cut it off along with a generous slice underneath.

If you have a question about food you receive, or think you deserve a replacement or refund, call the mail order company. If you have any questions about the safety of mail order food, call the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 800-535-4555.

Social Security Changes For 1994 Announced

Effective January 1, 1994, the Social Security wage base increased and the Medicare wage base was eliminated. The wage base is the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax. The tax rate remains at 6.2 percent for Social Security and 1.45 percent for Medicare.

Social Security And Medicare Changes For 1994

Social Security And Medicare Taxes

	1993	1994
Employee/Employer (each)	7.65%* up to a maximum of \$57,600	7.65%* up to a maximum of \$60,600

*Includes 6.2% for Social Security retirement, survivors and disability benefits and 1.45% for Medicare

Additional Taxes for Medicare

If you earn more than the maximum amounts for Social Security taxes indicated above, you continue to pay the Medicare portion of those taxes—or 1.45 percent—as indicated below.

	1993	1994
Employee/Employer (each)	1.45% on earnings between \$57,601 and \$135,000	1.45% on all earnings

DRIVE SAFE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON. CALL SOBERRIDE FOR A FREE TAXI HOME. REMEMBER: DRUNK DRIVING IS A CRIME.

1-800-778-8294

December 1 to January 2 - 7:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m.

EOE



The 1994 Social Security wage base is \$60,600 --up from \$57,600 last year. Therefore, employers should withhold the Social Security taxes on their employees' wages on wages up to \$60,600. Additionally this year employers should withhold the Medicare tax or 1.45 percent on all earnings. This differs from 1993 when Medicare taxes were withheld only up to the \$135,000 wage base.