

## Gathering Balsam Fir Tips for Maine Christmas Wreaths

Balsam fir is used to make Christmas wreaths and Christmas centerpieces in Maine because it is plentiful and makes beautifully fragrant wreaths. The tips of the branches are used which is the end portion. The tips are cut in lengths from 12 to 20 inches. One tip is normally broken into two or three pieces, bunched together and then wired onto the wreath ring.

Gathering the balsam tips is called tipping. Tipping can't start until late fall after the needles are set which is normally after the first few frosts. After the needles are set the balsam fir tree will stop growing, staying dormant, until spring. The pores in the needles are sealed by a waxy coating that covers the needle's surface. If tips are gathered before setting the needles fall off in a short time and can't be used. In Maine, balsam brush shouldn't be collected until after November 1 with a minimum of three consecutive 20 degree or colder nights.

To gather tips on privately owned forests the tippers have to get permission. Large corporations issue permits with fees for their property. Most wreath producers are very particular about the quality of the tips they purchase. It's hard to produce a top quality wreath if you don't have top quality balsam tips to start with. The tips should have needles on all sides of the tip's stems appearing rounded. They should be a dark green color. They also should be free of any sign of insect damage.

The best quality tips come from the middle of the tree. The branches on the top of the trees oftentimes have long stems and the bottom branches usually only have needles on one side. Naturally, wreath producers purchasing tips are looking for the deep green, rounded tips that come from the middle of the trees.

After cutting the tips are stacked on a stick in alternate directions until the stick weighs between 50 and 75 lbs. with twine attached to the ends for carrying. They are then taken to be sold to the local wreath producers. The tips are sold according to their weight.

Global warming may have an adverse effect on the [Christmas wreath](#) industry in Maine if it continues as predicted. As the fall gets warmer and warmer it's possible that we won't have the needed frost to set the needles on the balsam fir trees until it's too late for the Christmas season.

### About the Author

Lynn Jebbia is the owner of [Acadia Wreath Company](#). Acadia Wreath Company, based in Bar Harbor, Maine, handcrafts fresh Maine balsam fir [Christmas wreaths](#), Christmas Centerpieces and Kissing Balls which are shipped directly to customers and [corporate clients](#) throughout the United States.

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