Getting ready for the big Christmas Cut Down

ALREADY famous for its "Choose and Cut" Christmas Trees, the owners of Frenchay Christmas Tree Farm also wish to remind their customers that they can reserve their own growing tree for cutting closer to Christmas. This ensures a fresher tree, and it also means you can come earlier for a better choice.

In our early days - it must have been about 2004 - I would get up very early each December morning, and cut down as many trees as I could before 8am, and then drag them down the field - one or two at a time - to the car park where people would begin to turn up from 9am onwards. It was exhausting work, but great fun.

As demand increased, however, we had to find a better system, so we began to hand out saws to customers so that they could go into the field and choose and cut their own. It didn't take long for the idea to catch on, and each year more and more people turned up expecting to cut their own tree, either bringing their own saw or expecting us to provide one. One busy Saturday, I sent my dad out to B&Q to buy as many bow saws and gloves as he could, so that we could hand them out to eager customers. There were so many trees growing that a teepee I had put up amongst the Fraser Firs was pretty well hidden.

Apart from the health and safety concerns, we soon began to realise the havoc caused by unregulated cutting. By the end of the season 2009, there were suddenly very few Christmas Trees left for 2010! And since a Christmas tree takes about 7 years to grow, not only were there no trees for 2010, but no trees for 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.

Somehow we muddled through those last 7 years, being very careful how many trees we sold each year from our own field, and nurturing our remaining stock. Every year, the situation slowly improved, and this year we are beginning to see a new forest of Christmas Trees emerge, which means more choice for our customers.

Eager not to repeat the mistakes of the past, we now have a new system in place. We are restricting "choose and cut" to the dates of Saturday Nov26th to Sunday December 11th. If you want to come and reserve a tree during that time, but don't want to cut it until closer to Christmas, that's fine. We'll give you special ribbon and tag so that you can mark your tree, then you can come back when you're ready any day up until Christmas Eve to cut and collect your tree.

Even better, bring your own ribbons and markers, so that you can properly mark your tree to make sure that no one cuts it down by mistake.

Frenchay Christmas Tree Farm is open until Christmas Eve, 9am-6pm every day. www.frenchaychristmastreefarm.co.uk

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