



Preble Soil & Water Conservation District

Conserving our Natural Resources

November 2025

2789 US Rt. 35 E.
West Alexandria, OH 45381
(937) 456-5159
www.prebleswcd.org

CONSERVATION COMMENTS

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Josh Ruebush

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Bobby Hansford - District Tech/Wildlife Specialist

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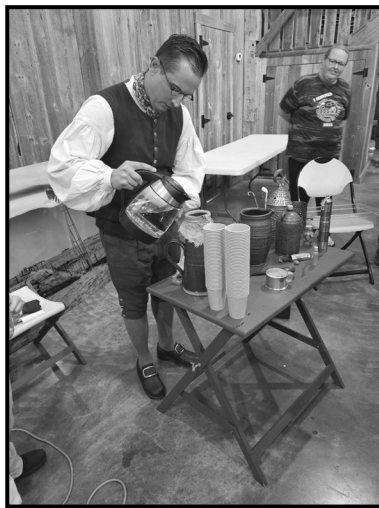
Renee Buck

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Get updates on our website:
www.prebleswcd.org

Annual Meeting and Banquet



Ben Anspaugh demonstrates his craft

On the evening of Tuesday, August 26, over 100 persons gathered at the Seedtime Acres Event Center outside of West Manchester to celebrate 76 years of conservation work in Preble County. Though the world around us has changed significantly since the Preble Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was formed in 1949, some things have not changed. Folks still enjoy getting together and enjoying a good meal and good company.

SWCD Board Chairman Brian Deaton welcomed everyone and James Price gave the blessing before a wonderful meal served by Shoelaces catering, LLC. Following the meal, Donald Hays recognized the elected officials in attendance.

Our keynote speaker for the evening was local historian Ben Anspaugh, who spoke on the history of coffee brewing in Europe and England two centuries ago, and how those methods were brought across the Atlantic and put to use in the early American colonies. He demonstrated the containers used to store ground coffee and then he brewed several batches of coffee on-site using reproduction earthenware pieces. Meeting attendees were then invited to sample the finished product.

Rodefer Farms of Eldorado was recognized as the 2025 Outstanding Cooperator for the conservation work done on their owned ground and on rented farms. Ralph and Lisa Clevenger were inducted as a package deal in the Conservation Hall of Fame for their work planting native grasses on their farm, enrolling land in farmland preservation, and for Lisa's three decades of educating and inspiring students as a vocational agriculture instructor at Twin Valley South.

Later on, the annual report was reviewed, noting several individuals and local businesses that have had a part in supporting Earth Day, Conservation Day Camp, and other events the District sponsors throughout the year. The audience then took part in Conservation Trivia, testing their knowledge of District events, history, Ohio geology, soils, and more. Trivia contest winners had first dibs on the door prizes, donated by: Bales Funeral Home, Brubaker Grain, Butler Rural Electric Cooperative, Deaton Popcorn, Eaton Hometowne Furniture, John's Tire Service, LCNB National Bank, Michael Murphy Insurance Agency, Preble County Historical Society, Quality Tile and Drainage Systems LLC, The Joe and Julie Saluke Family, Tupperware Consultant Stefanie Price, and Wilmington College.



The Rodeffer Family is recognized

The evening closed with the announcement that Donald Hays had been re-elected to serve a three-year term on the Preble Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors, beginning January 1, 2026. The District wishes to thank everyone who attended our 76th Annual Meeting, and we look forward to working with all of our customers in the coming year.

2026 Private Pesticide and Fertilizer Recertification

They say if you stand in one place long enough, everything will come back around. After eight years of Preble SWCD hosting the Private Pesticide and Fertilizer Recertification course, OSU Extension is once again sponsoring the class. Newly hired Preble County OSU Extension Ag and Natural Resources Educator Savannah Ballweg, who worked for Preble SWCD in the not-so-distant past, is organizing the class and registration has recently opened for it. While the District was glad to host the class for so many years, we are glad to have the course back in the hands of OSU Extension. For more details about the course, contact Savannah Ballweg, ANR Educator, at 937-300-6009, or at ballweg.9@osu.edu.

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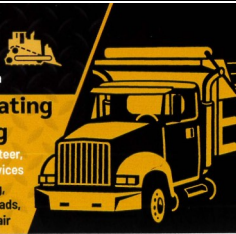
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Christmas Tree Selection Guide

By: Bobby Hansford

As early as 336 AD, the Roman calendar positioned December 25 as the day to observe Christmas. Special foods, decorations of greenery in the home, and gift giving were part of that custom. By 1100, Christmas was recognized as the most important holiday in Europe and St. Nicholas symbolized the tradition of gift giving. During the 1500s, a religious movement that led to the Reformation and the birth of Protestantism caused many Christians to consider Christmas a pagan celebration because it included many non-religious customs. In the 1600s, Christmas was outlawed in England and many British colonies in America, though gift giving continued and prevailed. During the 1800s, decorating a tree and sending cards became popular. The custom of decorating a Christmas tree spread throughout Germany into the rest of the European community and into England. It came to America with the German immigrants and because this custom was favored by British royalty, it became fashionable in the homes of many Americans of English descent.

Today, the tradition of decorating a Christmas tree lives on for about two-thirds of the American population. Half of these people will buy real Christmas trees while the other half will buy artificial trees. This year at least 100 million seedling conifers have been planted as Christmas trees seedlings and about 40 million trees will be cut and sold. Of all the Christmas trees, 90 percent of the trees are planted and raised on farms and ten percent are cut from native stands. In the U.S. alone, over one million acres are devoted to Christmas tree production.

The fir tree was considered the first tree of choice. The tree was honored because it symbolized immortality; always green and the top pointed to the heavens. Along with fir trees, pines and spruces are often among the best choices for a Christmas tree. One of the deciding factors could be the aroma put off by the tree. Another factor could be the needle retention and even the shape of the tree itself. No one enjoys cleaning up needles and wrapping paper.

Firs are distinguished by having soft, flat leaves or 'needles'. A common nickname is a friendly fir which refers to the trees delicate soft needles that generally do not inflict pain as other evergreens tend to do. Balsam and Douglas firs are the most common types of fir trees selected for the centerpiece of the home during Christmas. The trees tend to hold their needles for some time after being cut and exude the classic Christmas tree scent. The very symmetrical growth form is another desirable trait of the firs.

Pine trees have the greatest needle retention after being cut down. White pine and Scotch pine are the top pine tree choices for a Christmas tree. White pines have been known to have more brittle branches, so try to avoid those hefty ornaments if you decide on this tree. However, pines also have a wonderful scent and look the part with presents underneath. Pine trees are the fastest growing Christmas tree. This can help out farms with low inventory, or even if you can wait 6 to 7 years to have a Pine tree sacrificed in the name of Christmas from your very own backyard.

Spruce trees are another favorite, chosen for their symmetrical shape and sturdy, supportive branches. From a distance, it may be hard to distinguish spruce from firs. Spruces have quite sharp, stiff needles unlike firs. The alluring Colorado Blue spruce could be found at farms in our area. You can see this tree commonly planted as a landscaping ornamental tree. The scent is somewhat more pungent than the other choices presented thus far; some may like this and others not so much. Another drawback to spruce is the lack of the ability to keep its needles after being harvested. Pair that with sharp needles, and you may just need your work boots on to walk near it to prevent the needle-like leaves from entering your foot.

Best wishes in your search for a live Christmas tree this year!

BJ's Philosophy Box

If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.

-Lewis Carroll

Frank Miller Lumber: A Visit to the Mill

By: BJ Price

Every second Tuesday of the month, Frank Miller Lumber hosts a one-hour walking tour of their mill just outside of Union City, Indiana. Having a bit of sawdust in my own veins, I spent the morning of Veteran's Day touring Frank Miller Lumber. Their guide was knowledgeable, having done a little bit of everything around the mill in his decades of work there.

We met in the retail showroom and began our tour in their giant warehouse where pallets of fine lumber from around the world were stored for resale in the United States. Since Frank Miller Lumber primarily saws white oak, red oak, and hard maple, most everything else they sell has to come from another mill, either domestic or overseas.

At their current rate of production they saw 80,000 board feet of lumber each day. That's 20 semi-trailers of logs sawn, every day. To picture one board foot, imagine a piece of lumber one foot long, one foot wide, and one inch thick. On New Year's Day of 1992, their old mill burned to the ground and a new mill was constructed in a vacant Westinghouse factory building located just down the road from the old mill. The new mill opened in the spring of 1993 and has been operational ever since.

Each log goes through the debarker to remove the bark along with the dirt and rocks that always go along with the bark. At some point, logs are scanned for hardware that could dull or destroy the band blade. Each log is quartered on the headsaw, then the log quarters are sent to the resaw for further processing.

Even with all of the mechanization at a large mill like this, the grading of each piece of lumber is still done by the human eye. A machine puts marks on each piece and later on down the line, the green lumber is pulled out and stacked by size and grade, then stacks of green lumber are later stickered to allow air movement through the stack and sent to the kilns for drying.

Once kiln-dried, lumber is bundled and labeled for shipment. Some lumber for export to certain markets is planed prior to overseas shipment in order to eliminate shipping excess product and weight that would eventually wind up as sawdust anyways.

Our tour of Frank Miller Lumber wrapped up back at the showroom where we first began. We took a few minutes to gawk at all the sizes and species of lumber for sale before heading for home. As someone who has toured several different lumber mills across the United States, it's fascinating and inspiring to see such a sizable sawmill so near to home. For more information or to RSVP for your own tour, contact Frank Miller Lumber at 800-345-2643.



Preble County Plat Book

Not sure what to get for Christmas for that hard-to-shop-for person in your life? How about a Preble County Plat Book! Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the District, these plat books are loaded with all the latest features, including updated property ownership, current aerial photos, and historical aerial photos from the District's birth year of 1949. The Plat Books retail for \$30.00, cash or check, and are sold right here at the District office, at the Land Use Management Office in the Preble County courthouse, and at the Preble County Historical Society.

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Dates to Remember:

December 17th - Board Meeting
December 24 - Christmas Eve (office closed)
December 25 - Christmas Day (office closed)
January 1 - New Year's Day (office closed)

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Recent Woodland Management Workshop

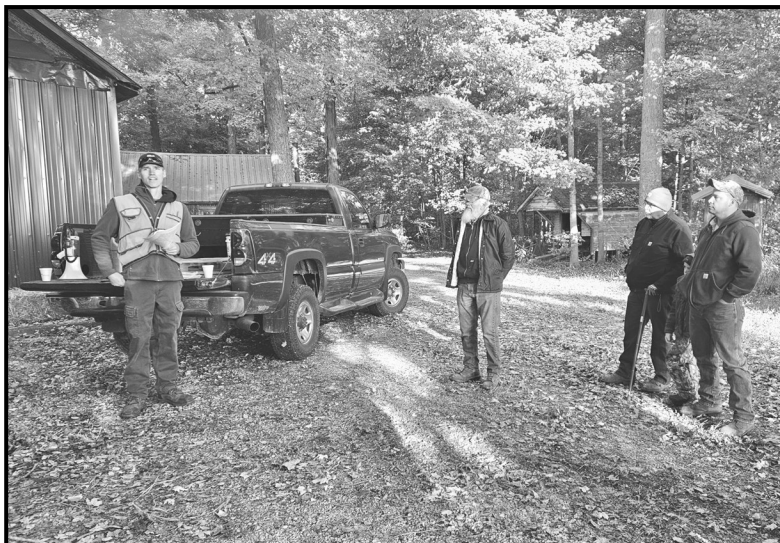
On Friday, October 24th, the Darke Soil and Water Conservation District hosted another excellent Woodland Management Workshop. The Lecklider family, just south of Versailles, was our host for the morning.

The day started out brisk and chilly, but the blue skies and sunshine plus a walk in the woods got everyone warmed up. The Leckliders shared details on a wooded wetland that was constructed many years ago to enlarge a wet area in the woods and to attract a more diverse array of wildlife. Standing dead trees in the wetland attract woodpeckers and cavity nesters such as wood ducks. The area also attracts many songbirds, red-wing blackbirds, and bats. The site is home to a long list of salamanders, wood frogs, leopard frogs, and spring peepers.

Later on down the trail, participants toured an area that was recently cleared of undesirable trees and brush to prepare it for new tree seedlings. Near the cabin, everyone was able to look inside the heart of their sugarbush where the evaporator sat silent, waiting for another run of sap next winter.

Master Logger Bill Metzger brought along his big Husquvarna for a tree-felling demonstration. Before he got started, he thunked the tree trunk with the backside of his axe to see how sound the tree was or if it might be punky. He suspected that it might have some internal rot, and as soon as he dropped it, everyone was able to see the damage that he had 'heard' with his axe.

Preston Winner from M. Bolke Veneer Corp. just down the road in Fairfield, Ohio, gave a talk on what they are searching for when buying top-quality veneer logs. Lastly, a hot lunch was served and everyone enjoyed the camaraderie with other folks who would rather do nothing else than spend an autumn morning in the woods. If you missed this workshop, keep your eyes open for another workshop to be hosted in Preble County in the fall of 2026.



State Service Forester Justin Law welcomes the crowd