

## CHRISTMAS GREENS: A YEAR IN THE MAKING

> Christmas is a year-round subject for Pacific Northwest wreath producers such as Continental Floral Greens. That's because early planning is a key part of ensuring a successful and smooth holiday for wholesalers, retail florists and mass marketers who use our Christmas greens.

Planning for the holiday season starts in early spring, when we send our Christmas pricing to customers. This gives them time to talk with their customers and prebook with us in early August. (Yes, August!) Then, we take the orders and develop a production schedule for our multiple facilities. We check and doublecheck that we have all the supplies needed for the season, such as ribbons, hardgoods, and pinecones, as well as shipper bins, which we produce and store on our large parking lots. By mid-September, we have a solid plan for each location so they can gather supplies and set up production areas.

Continental has a seven- to eight-week period to harvest, transport, produce and ship its Christmas products. We start cutting noble fir, grown at 3,000 feet above sea level, at the beginning of October on our 9,000-acre farm overlooking Mt. St. Helens in Washington. During harvest, boughs are cut from the sides of trees using pole pruners or from the tops of trees



**HEFTY HARVEST** (Above) Continental Floral Greens loads boughs of greens into trucks, which deliver the harvest to wreath-producing facilities in Washington. (Below) A worker bunches boughs to be loaded in trucks.

that have been removed and laid on the ground using machinery. Teams bundle 80 to 100 pounds of noble boughs and leave them on the ground for pickup.

When enough bundles are ready, the team leader calls in a helicopter to pick up bundles and drop them into the back of open-topped 53-foot trailers. The Washington terrain is very rugged and using a helicopter is the most efficient way to get the product from a hillside into the trailer. Once full, the truck heads to one of Continental's wreath-producing facilities in Shelton or Belfair, about a two-and-a-half to three-hour drive. The product is unloaded and placed in one of many large, refrigerated rooms to be used within days or weeks to produce wreaths, garlands and centerpieces. Continental has more than 500 workers making wreaths every day of the week.

The finished product is packaged on racks or in boxes and labeled. Most orders begin shipping in early November to wholesalers, big box stores, and supermarket customers across the U.S. Most orders are shipped before Thanksgiving, giving stores products to display so that the minute people are done eating their turkey on Thanksgiving, they can start decorating for Christmas.

The next time you look at a Christmas wreath, remember, there are a lot of people working and planning to make it possible long before you see it! 🌲

**F.J. Trzusowski** is vice president of sales at Continental Floral Greens, which operates farms in Washington, Oregon, California, and Florida. He is also a member of the Society of American Florists' Board of Directors.

