



Balsam Boughs

Balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) is a short-lived, cold-climate tree that grows in the northern lake states. It grows in areas with abundant soil moisture and high humidity. In wetlands, balsam fir trees grow in pure stands are mixed in with black spruce, cedar and tamarack. In higher areas, it is typically found in the understory of pine, aspen and birch stands.

Balsam fir has flat, fragrant needles that make attractive wreaths. The balsam bough harvesting season begins in early October and runs through early December with boughs retaining their needles best if harvested after the second hard frost.

Permits

The U.S. Forest Service requires individuals interested in gathering forest products to have a permit. There are several different types of permits available depending on the product to be harvested. The most popular products include Christmas Trees, Boughs and Firewood, however a permit is also needed for products such as princess pine, birch bark and assorted twigs and stems. The most common permit is the Forest Products Removal Permit that varies in price depending on the product being removed. Individuals may also be issued a Free Use Permit if a small amount of products is harvested for personal use only.

Balsam boughs are the only type of boughs that can be harvested on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Forest Product Removal Permits for Balsam Boughs are \$80 for up to two tons of material. Additional material may be purchased with an additional permit for \$40/ton. Transportation authorization tags are issued in denominations of 200 pounds/tag.

Permits can be obtained from any of the Ranger District Offices on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. For a list of offices visit www.fs.usda.gov/CNNE.

Other conditions of the permit:

1. The permit is valid for the permittee and their immediate family (including: spouse, children, and guardian children of any age living at family residence and parents of permittee). Persons that are non-family members may be allowed to help permittee gather boughs. These persons must be accompanied by the permittee and be within shouting distance of the permittee at all times while gathering. The forest products gathered by these persons must also be transported in the permittee's vehicle listed on the permit and the permittee must be in the vehicle during transport of the special forest products.



2. Permit and Transport Authorization Tags must accompany the permittee or individual(s) authorized to gather under the permit. Transport Authorization Tags must be filled out in ink and attached to boughs for every 200 pounds of boughs.
The permittee is encouraged not to harvest more than one-third of each branch in order to continue regrowth. Only remove branches from the lower half of the tree. If essentially all of a branch will be removed, flush cutting the branch close to the tree as required.
3. Collecting is prohibited within 50 feet of the cleared area of a paved or two lane gravel road and within 50 feet of the cleared portion of a designated hiking or ski trail.
4. No live trees may be felled for bough collection.
5. Prior to collecting in active timber sales, you must have written permission from the nearest Ranger District and a bough permit.
6. Use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and two or four wheel drive trucks are not allowed off of Forest Roads, except with written permission from the Ranger District where the gathering is occurring.

Proper Harvesting of Boughs

It is important to properly harvest boughs from balsam fir trees to ensure the trees survival and it allows the branches to grow into a harvestable bough again in five or six years. Following the guidelines below will help provide a sustainable harvest of boughs each year while supporting the bough market.

- Harvest boughs from trees that are greater than X feet in height
- Harvest boughs from the bottom third of the tree. The wreath industry prefers the flat or semi-round boughs that are typically found at the bottom of balsam trees.
- When harvesting, leave a portion of the branch with needles and buds on it to allow it to grow again next year.
- Harvested branches should have ends no larger than the diameter of a pencil.
- Boughs should be 18-30 inches in length. Shorter boughs are preferred by buyers.



**Forest
Service**

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

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