

# Decorative Boughs Permit and License



Boughs, like those from a branch of a balsam fir, have fragrant needles that make attractive wreaths and other decorative greens. Minnesota-made wreaths are distributed nationwide, and the decorative wreath and greens industry offers seasonal employment to thousands of people throughout the state.

Careful management and harvesting support healthy forests and a supply of decorative boughs into the future. Harvester permits and buyer's licenses are important tools to ensure sound management of our forest resources and illustrate the industry's commitment to sustainability.

## Do I Need a Permit or License?

Harvesting and buying all types of decorative forest material is governed by *Minnesota Statutes*, sections 88.641 - 88.648. A "HARVESTER" IS ANY PERSON COLLECTING DECORATIVE MATERIALS FROM A FOREST. A "BUYER" IS ANY PERSON PURCHASING DECORATIVE FOREST MATERIAL.

### Harvester Permit

Permission is needed to harvest on public or private lands.

**Public Land:** A harvester needs a permit to harvest any amount of boughs on public land. The harvester can obtain the permit from the government land manager—state, county, or federal. Each government land manager issues their own permit. Costs and

requirements vary, be sure to contact the right local government office for details.

**Private Land:** A harvester must obtain written consent, permit, or bill of sale from the land owner to harvest more than 100 pounds on any private land. The documentation must contain the legal description or property tax identification number of the land, as well as the landowner's name, address, and signature.

### Buyer's License

A buyer's license is required to purchase more than 100 pounds of decorative boughs, harvested from any land in Minnesota—public or private. Only one buyer's license is needed, regardless if the boughs come from public or private land. Purchase licenses at any Electronic License System (ELS) vendor—the same locations where hunting and fishing licenses are sold.

Buyers must keep a decorative material buyer's log to record and track:

- Harvester's name and address
- Type of consent: permit, written consent, or bill of sale
- Harvest permit number for boughs from public land
- Legal description and property tax ID number for boughs from private land

Records must be maintained until June 30 of the following calendar year. Buyers may NOT purchase decorative materials from a harvester who is unable to furnish all required information. For a buyer's log template, visit [mndnr.gov/decorativeforestproducts](http://mndnr.gov/decorativeforestproducts)

### Transporting

A harvester transporting or possessing more than 100 pounds of boughs or other decorative material must carry a harvester permit or written landowner consent for the material. A buyer and anyone transporting material for a buyer must have a buyer's license and buyer's log for all the material in the load.

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## Penalties

A person who fails to comply with the law is subject to a misdemeanor, seizure, and confiscation of decorative boughs, and other penalties provided by law. The DNR Commissioner may deny, modify, suspend, or revoke a buyer's license for reasonable cause, including falsifying required records or for violating *Minnesota Statutes*, sections 88.641 - 88.648.

## Sustainable Harvest Practices

Bough harvest begins in early October, after two or more hard frosts have “set” the needles on the branches. Gathering boughs and making decorative holiday products is a longstanding tradition in Minnesota. Thoughtful pruning and careful harvesting allows branches to regenerate over 5 to 6 years—in time, allowing the tradition to continue.

## Careful harvest techniques to keep Minnesota's forests growing strong

- Harvest only boughs, not the whole tree.
- Harvest boughs only from the bottom half of the tree. Trees grow from the top and tips of branches. Leaving the top ensures future tree growth. Plus, the flat, bottom branches are preferred by wreath makers.

- Harvest less than half of a tree's boughs to increase tree survival.
- Leave a minimum of 2 inches at the base of each pruned branch, allowing new boughs to grow. Cutting branches flush may harm the trunk and stop future growth.
- Work with trees that are greater than 5 feet high. Only fully-established trees can sustain bough harvest.
- Harvest the entire branch whorl instead of a shorter individual branch.
- Cut branches with ends no larger in diameter than a pencil.
- Trim boughs to 36 inches or less in length. Preferred by wreath makers, this size creates less waste.

## More Info

Visit [mndnr.gov/decorativeforestproducts](http://mndnr.gov/decorativeforestproducts) for details on permits and licenses, plus great sustainable harvesting resources such as:

- [Minnesota Harvester Handbook](#) from the University of Minnesota
- [Balsam Bough Harvesting Techniques](#)

