

Frequently Asked Questions - Street Trees

Street Tree Ownership and Routine Maintenance

What are street trees?

A "street tree" is any tree planted by or on behalf of the City in the street Right-Of-Way. Typically trees are planted in the "park strip" which is the area between the sidewalk and the street.

Sometimes, when the sidewalk is adjacent to the curb, (known as a "monolithic sidewalk") the tree is planted next to the sidewalk. If a tree is not within the public right-of-way, it is NOT a street tree. The species of street trees vary but include trees like Crape Myrtle, Chinese Pistache, and Chitalpa, just to name a few.

Who owns and maintains street trees?

They are owned by the City.

What is the right-of-way?

The public right-of-way is the area that includes the street, sidewalk, and some property along the street. Typically, the City has an easement over this area. The width varies from street to street, but typically the ROW extends approximately 10' from the back of curb towards the adjacent property. Most of the trees planted in the park strip between the sidewalk and street are street trees. If there is no park strip, trees planted in the property owners front yard or setback, near the sidewalk may be street trees.

How do I know if a tree is a city-owned tree?

Most trees located in the public right-of-way, as explained above, are City trees. If you have a question as to whether a tree is in the right-of-way, you can check the exact dimensions of the right-of-way with the Engineering Division at 408-846-0450. If the tree does not lie within the city right-of-way, the tree is not a street tree. Trees on private streets are not city trees.

What Maintenance does the City provide for street trees?

We have a two-person crew and one seasonal employee that provide certain maintenance services such as pruning and spraying for street trees. The City also contracts out several services including the planting, stump grinding, and some pruning.

What trees does Urban Forestry work on?

We maintain trees growing on city property. That includes trees growing on street rights-of-way, in parks, and on other city properties. When a request for work on a street tree is made, staff will inspect the tree, determine if it is a city street tree, and what work is needed. If the tree is not on the right-of-way, or is not a City street tree, staff will advise you. We can't perform tree work on private property, so you would need to hire an arborist.

What is the property owners responsibility for maintaining city street trees?

As the adjacent owner, you are expected to maintain everything between the street and your property line (the right-of-way line), including the sidewalk and street trees. Maintenance includes watering, and removing fallen leaves, branches, and fruit debris. However, residents SHALL NOT trim, prune, spray, or remove city trees without a permit from the City.

Trees should be "deep watered," that is, watered slowly for an extended period of time. This helps promote deep root growth, which is better for the tree. It can also help reduce damage caused by shallow roots. Residents are also responsible for leaf raking and removal, removal of ivy, and removal of routine tree debris such as small twigs and branches that might drop or be knocked off by passing trucks.

Who do I call if a tree needs work?

If your request is regarding sidewalk damage, you should contact the engineering division at 408-846-0450.

Requests for pruning, spraying, inspection and similar services can be made by calling Community Services at 408-846-0444. The support staff will take information on your request and will generate a work request for the Urban Forestry crews. Staff will inspect the tree and report to you what, if any, work is required.

The city crew's first priority is urgent problems such as cracked limbs, trees that are at risk of falling, and downed trees. Many routine tree maintenance services are contracted out. The tree crew only handles routine service requests on a time available basis. If your request is for a service that is not urgent in nature, it may be put on a work order list to be included in a future contract. It is very costly and inefficient for the tree crew to provide routine tree services on a spot by spot basis. Whenever possible, tree services that are not urgent will be held and scheduled so that the crew or contractor can take care of all the trees in a given area at the same time.

I've got bees in my tree!!! What do I do? Will the City remove them?

Generally, swarming bees do not need to be removed. A Honeybee colony contains only a single Queen, but in order to ensure new colonies can begin and the populations can grow, new Queen bees are produced each year. All the Queens except one will leave their parent colony, to fly off and establish their own colonies somewhere else. As they leave they take a large "entourage" of worker bees with them, and you may have seen this exciting dispersal flight as what is called a "swarm", often in the warm days of early spring. This can be a pretty frightening thing to be in the middle of, as hundreds or thousands of bees suddenly are flying around and past you as you are walking down the street.

However, at this time there is less chance of being stung, for the workers at this time are not defending anything in particular, and have no instinct to attack you, unless one gets trapped in your clothes and feels personally threatened. The swarms stop each day to rest, usually as a huge ball of bees with the Queen somewhere in the midst of all the workers, and from this blob workers will venture off in different directions looking for an appropriate cavity to offer their Queen as a potential new home.

The best course of action, should you one day discover a football-sized clump of bees in a tree in your front yard, or perhaps on the fence, is.....nothing, for in a day or so the bees will leave again. The tree limb and fence are not good nest sites, so all they are doing is hanging out while the workers look for a better place.

Basically, Honey Bees are defensive and will attack only something that is threatening their colony. Swarms first move to a temporary site such as a tree branch. The swarm will usually remain here for about 24-48 hours until permanent quarters are located, and then move on. Permanent quarters may consist of a bee hive, hollow tree, hollow wall, attics, etc., typically some place which is sheltered from the weather.

There is Mistletoe or Ivy in my tree, will the Forestry crew remove it?

Mistletoe will not harm the tree and can be left in place. Ivy growing up a tree trunk can literally suffocate a tree. It is the property owners responsibility to remove ivy.

My Street tree is diseased, dripping sap, or infested with insects

There are a number of diseases and infestations that can attack street trees such as powdery mildew and aphids. Most street trees are selected from species or varieties with the greatest resistance to disease, however diseases and infestations can still occur. In most cases, these diseases are left to run their course and the tree is healthy enough to resist the disease or infestation, spraying is done only when absolutely essential. If you have a tree that appears diseased or infested please call community services at 846-0444 to have staff inspect the tree.

Why doesn't someone rake the leaves from street trees?

Routine maintenance including raking leaves is the responsibility of the property owner. Generally, you should put them out for disposal along with your other green waste or compost them in your yard.

During the leaf fall season, in areas with the heaviest leaf fall, such as Miller, 6th St. and 5th St., our staff will use the tractor to scrape leaves into a pile, and then load the leaves into a dump truck and haul them away. If you live in one of these areas, and rake your leaves into a pile, please be sure that the pile is placed away from the curb and gutter. This reduces the leaves being washed down the gutter and clogging storm drains, and makes it easier for the crews to pick up the leaves.

Why are street trees important?

Street trees are a vital asset to the urban environment. Without street trees, the City is a sterile landscape of concrete, brick, steel, and asphalt. Picture the City of Gilroy without any trees and you see a pretty grim picture. Trees add beauty and create an environment beneficial to our mental health. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and other gases and, in turn, replenish the atmosphere with oxygen for people to breathe. Trees have other benefits that people take for granted. They help cool the streets with shade, lessen glare off buildings and sidewalks, absorb noise, and bring beauty to our community.

Street Tree Removal

I think my tree should be cut down. Will Urban Forestry do that? Urban Forestry does not routinely remove trees except in emergencies. However, property owners may obtain a permit to remove trees that comply with the City's Tree Removal Policy. This includes the following:

- Trees that are hazardous (i.e dead, split, structurally unsound)
- Trees creating a traffic hazard that can not be remedied with pruning
- Disease or infestation beyond reclamation
- Crowding other trees
- Can not be safely root pruned
- Presents a eminent hazard to previously existing structures or utilities
- Specified species of trees (Elms, Liquid Ambers, Ash) in parkstrips less than 5' or 6' wide.

The City will not remove, or permit removal of trees because they're dropping leaves or sap, because it's grown too large, is uplifting sidewalks, shading other landscaping, interfering with satellite reception, or because it's not in the most desirable location.

I think my tree qualifies for removal, who do I call to get it removed?

Property owners may request a permit for tree removal from the Community Services Department. You can pick up a tree removal permit application at Community Services Department in City Hall, or you Call 408-846-0444 to request a permit be mailed to you. Not all requests to remove a tree will be approved. City staff will inspect the tree and site to determine if it complies with the tree removal policy. Deviations from this policy can only be made by the Parks and Recreation Commission. Typically, City staff will not remove trees except where there is an eminent hazard.

Will Urban Forestry cut down a street tree so I don't have to rake leaves?

Urban Forestry will not remove trees for this reason alone. We will only remove trees that are hazardous.

Street Tree Planting

How do I get a street tree planted?

Property owners are free to plant whatever tree they like on their own property outside the public Right of Way. If you would like the City to consider planting a street tree in front of your home, call Community Services to make a request. Requests will be considered based on current tree policies and available funding. Typically, the City contracts for tree planting and the planting is done in batches 2 or 3 times a year. Your location will be placed on a list to be included in the next tree planting contract. If you wish to plant a tree sooner than the City is able to, you may request a permit to plant a street tree. There are designated tree species for every street in the City, and the tree you plant must be the tree designated on the street tree master planting plan. Exceptions to the plan can only be granted by the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Can I plant a tree myself?

Yes, however you must obtain a permit from community services and the tree and planting methods must adhere to the City's standards for street trees. The City's policy requires that the tree be planted by a licensed landscape contractor

What are the City's standards for planting street trees? A copy of the street tree planting detail is available from engineering services at 408-846-0450.

Street Tree Pruning & Root Pruning, and Tree Stumps

The street tree in front of my house needs to be pruned. Who should I call?

Community Services at 846-0444. All street trees are on a regular pruning schedule. Routine pruning is planned so that the crew can prune all the trees in a given geographic area at the same time. This is the most efficient and cost effective way to prune. Current funding limits routine, non-emergency, tree pruning to no more frequently than once every 11 years. If you feel your tree needs routine pruning, you can contact Community Services and the tree will be pruned in accordance with the schedule along with other trees in your neighborhood.

If there is some type of hazard, such as a cracked limb, or downed or leaning tree, staff will respond and inspect the tree and prune or remove the tree as needed to correct the hazard. Non-urgent pruning outside of the scheduled maintenance is only done on a time available basis. If the property owner wishes to have a tree pruned sooner, they may request a permit from Community Services to prune the tree.

City trees are pruned according to internationally accepted pruning guidelines that are designed to promote the health and safety of each tree. This means that the City will NEVER "top" a tree, or simply cut off the top part of the limbs. If you believe a street tree is causing a problem with street lights, power lines, or other structures, call Community Services at (408) 846-0444 to report the problem.

What are the repercussions if you trim or prune street trees without a permit?

We hope people do not take it upon themselves to prune street trees. Street tree pruning must be performed carefully by a trained and experienced arborist. If a person removes, tops or prunes street trees without permission from the City, they can be fined and they become liable for damages to the tree. So please contact the City for a permit prior to conducting any pruning on a street tree.

I need a tree stump removed, who does that?

The City contracts for stump grinding services once per year. Please call community Services at 408-846-0444 to request that your stump be included in our next stump removal contract.

My tree needs root pruning, who do I call?

Call Community Services at 846-0444. Root pruning is done once a year in the fall. This is the best time to prune roots for the health of the tree. Staff will take the information on your tree, and it will be put on the list for root pruning during the next root pruning cycle. See the section on sidewalks for further information.

Damage to Sidewalks, curbs, gutters, underground utilities (sewer, water)

The street tree in front of my house has damaged the sidewalk. Who should I call?

The property owner is responsible for repair of damaged sidewalks. The City's engineering department manages a 50/50 reimbursement program. The City will reimburse the property owner for 50% of the cost of replacing sidewalks, subject to available funding. Contact the Engineering Department at 846-0450 to request information on the 50/50 program. At the time of the repair, you can have roots pruned and/or install root barriers to minimize future damage. If the tree meets the requirements for tree removal, you may request to remove the tree and plant a new tree.

It's the City's street tree that caused the damage, why doesn't the City repair the sidewalk or pay the full amount of the repair cost?

The California Streets and Highway code specifies that the adjacent property owners are responsible for maintenance and repair of sidewalks, curbs, gutters within the public Right of Way. The City recognizes the burden that this places on the property owner and developed the 50/50 program to help offset some of those costs.

What can I do to about tree roots in my sewer or water line?

Tree roots are opportunistic. While they will not crack a sound sewer service or water line, they will exploit cracks or failures in the lines. The best defense against having tree roots in lines is to make sure that your lines are in good condition and that they're not cracked. Property owners are responsible for the water and sewer lines from the curb to the house. If your problem with tree roots is in this area, you will need to contact a plumber to help you with the work. If you suspect that tree roots are growing into your sewer line, you can have the roots cut out using a process called "rodding". You can also flush Copper Sulfate down the toilet two to three times per year to prevent roots from growing into sewer lines. Copper Sulfate is an inexpensive chemical that can be purchased at most hardware stores. Urban Forestry will not remove a tree solely because of roots in lines.

Tree roots have pushed up the sidewalk. Will you cut down the tree?

Urban Forestry will not remove a tree solely because of sidewalk failure. Please contact engineering Department for information on the City's 50/50 reimbursement program for sidewalk repair

Street Trees and Overhead Utilities

The trees along the street have grown up into the powerlines, and I'm worried about power failure. Will Urban Forestry prune these limbs?

Urban Forestry doesn't prune trees for transmission line clearance due to Line Clearance Certification requirements. Contractors working for the utilities will do this work. Contact PG&E (800-743-5000)

Can't anything be done about the way that the street trees are pruned under the powerlines?

Line clearance pruning, while unsightly to many people, is necessary to ensure reliable power.

The real answer to this situation is planting the right tree in the right place. This means that the type of tree to be planted is selected based on the location where it will be planted. The only trees that Urban Forestry will plant under transmission lines are trees that will mature at a height low enough to prevent conflict with the overhead utility lines. This way, the trees won't need to be trimmed for line clearance.

Miscellaneous

Vegetation and low tree limbs make it difficult to see at an intersection. Can Urban Forestry help?

Urban Forestry can evaluate these blind corners and sight distance problems to determine the best method to improve the situation. Let us know where the intersection is and we'll do our best to solve the problem.

A tree is blocking a stop sign or light

Call Community Services at 846-0444 to have the tree inspected, pruned or removed as necessary.

My neighbor has a dead tree that could fall onto my house. What can be done about this?

Urban Forestry can't get involved in these types of "civil dispute" situations. We recommend that you get legal counsel on how to handle this if your neighbor has not responded to your request to deal with the situation.

Does Urban Forestry give away or sell the wood chips it's crews make? It would make great mulch.

Depending on availability, once a year during the Earth Day celebration, typically in April, the City will have wood chips and compost available for public pick up. Contact our Environmental Services Coordinator at 846-0460 to find out when the next Earth Day celebration will occur.

Can Urban Forestry come out and pick up the debris from a tree that I trimmed?

Urban Forestry crews will only pick up debris from trees that they pruned. We generally will chip debris as we go. You can put out tree debris with your green waste picked up by the garbage company. Contact South Valley Disposal and Recycling at 842-3358 to find out your green waste pick up day.