

Frequently Asked Questions

Who do I call if a Tree needs work?

If your tree of concern is a privately owned tree on your property or on a neighboring privately owned lot, you may proceed as follows: in the former case you will need to hire an arborist--for tips on how to hire an arborist, click here: <http://www.isa-arbor.com/publicoutreach/whyhirecertifiedarborist/index.aspx>. In the latter case, you will need to notify the owner of the property of origin that you have a concern.

If the tree in question is a "City Tree", you can make a maintenance request by calling Durham One Call at (919) 560-1200. A dispatcher will take your request and enter a work request into our queue within our work order database. The request will then be inspected, after which an Urban Forestry staff member will report to you what we can or cannot do and how long the wait might be before it is completed.

What is a "City Tree"?

The city maintains trees growing on City property. This category includes trees growing on opened and maintained rights-of-way (on city-maintained streets and alleys), in parks, and on other city properties. The widths of street rights-of-way vary from street to street, so if a tree close to the street needs attention, let us know. We'll evaluate the tree and determine if it is on the right-of-way. If the tree needs work and is on the right-of-way, we'll do the work at no charge to you. If the tree is not on the right-of-way, we'll let you know. We can't perform work on private trees, and will only access city trees via private property with the owners' written consent.

What do you mean by "opened right-of-way" or "city-maintained streets and alleys"?

Rights-of-way are areas set aside during the process of developing a piece of land for the purpose of placing one or more elements of infrastructure. A street right-of-way can contain a private street, a state-maintained road, a city street, or remain un-opened. An alley right-of-way can contain a private alley, a maintained or "opened" city alley, or remain un-opened. These rights-of-way are wider than the pavement that they support, often by up to 20 feet or more, and the "left-over" land is where sidewalks, drainage ditches, utility poles, and "City Trees" are located. The city does not acknowledge maintenance responsibility over trees that originate in unopened or private roads, or alleys. If your tree of concern is along a city street or on the edge of an opened and maintained city alley (one which is used for solid waste pick-up), the trees are ours to maintain.

I think my tree is a "City Tree" and should be cut down. Will Urban Forestry do that?

Urban Forestry will remove trees that are hazardous, and growing on City property. A hazardous tree, as defined by the International Society of Arboriculture must meet three criteria:

- The tree has the size and weight to cause damage if it were to fall
- There is a target (the thing that would be damaged if the tree were to fall)
- The tree has a condition that makes it likely that the tree would fall

Urban Forestry will inspect requests for tree removal from city property promptly, and if the tree is found to be hazardous, then our Tree Crews will remove the tree. If the entire tree is not hazardous, but maintenance work is required, we'll write a work order to perform this work.

If we can find no evidence that the tree is hazardous, we'll let you know and monitor that tree to make sure its condition doesn't change. To learn more about hazard tree assessment you may visit the International Society of Arboriculture website: <http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/hazards.aspx>. For more information about our policies, please refer to our [Tree Removal Policy](#).

I've got a tree in my backyard that needs some work. Will Urban Forestry do this work?

We can only work on trees that are growing on City property. For private tree work, you'll need to hire an arborist. Tips on how to hire an arborist: <http://www.isa-arbor.com/publicoutreach/whyhirecertifiedarborist/index.aspx>.

There is a tree in my neighbor's yard that makes me nervous. Will Urban Forestry help me?

If your concern is over how the tree might fail and impact the adjacent street and sidewalk, we are in a position to help. We can provide input in situations where trees in private yards pose an imminent hazard to city property or adjacent right-of-way. However, if your concern is over the potential of a neighbor's tree falling onto your property that is a matter to be resolved between you and your neighbor. For private risk assessments on neighboring trees, you'll need to hire an arborist to provide the necessary documentation to persuade the neighboring property owner to take action. This documentation will need to be presented to its intended audience in a way that provides you with proof that it was delivered, such as by certified mail. If it fails to persuade your neighbor, you will at least be in possession of proof that your concern was communicated and liability for future damage may be easier to argue. Tips on how to hire an arborist: <http://www.isa-arbor.com/publicoutreach/whyhirecertifiedarborist/index.aspx>.

There is a tree in the easement next to my property that's leaning over my fence. Will you cut it down?

Easements are agreements that allow one entity to install something (like a pipe or a utility line) under or over someone else's property. In gaining the easement, maintenance responsibility does not transfer from the property owner to the easement owner. The responsibility for maintenance still lies with the owner of the property upon which the easement sits.

Also, in many cases a so-called "easement" is in reality an unopened or "paper" street or alley (so-called because they exist only on paper) which are not accepted by the city for maintenance.

There's a vacant City lot next to my house, and there are trees on it growing over my property line. Will you cut them back?

Unless the tree in question is in a hazardous condition as described in a previous section (see "I think my tree is..."), the trees will not be pruned or removed. If your goal is to obtain more light or to proactively protect a target such as an outbuilding or a fence from branches shed from otherwise healthy trees, you may request a permit from Urban Forestry and perform these inputs at your expense. [Click Here](#) (link to "how to obtain a permit for planting and/or maintenance of Trees on city property")

There is a tree behind my house in a "Tree Protection Area" that I'm afraid will fall. Will I get in trouble if I cut it down?

Tree protection areas (TPA) are often placed on property surrounding individual home sites on communal Homeowner's Association (HOA) land within newer subdivisions. When this happens, the HOA is responsible for maintaining the trees there and will need to determine what their roles and responsibilities are. In rare circumstances these TPAs are located on individual lots and are subject to approval by the City/County Planning Department. Call Urban Forestry to verify the existence of a TPA and you will get detailed instructions on how to proceed.

The trees along the street have grown up into the power lines, or have grown over phone lines, cable or service drops and I'm worried about an interruption of service. Will Urban Forestry prune these limbs?

Urban Forestry doesn't prune trees for the distribution of power, telecommunication, or internet service. These services are provided at cost by for-profit companies whose practices reflect their guiding policies. Some utilities, such as Duke Energy, have a pro-active policy of vegetation management, which means that under certain circumstances they prune trees away from their wires to prevent outages. Other utilities, such as telecommunications, cable and internet providers, react to outages by repairing breaks in their lines only after they occur and do not prune trees away from their lines proactively. Urban Forestry is not resourced to provide pruning inputs to safeguard the delivery of these privately funded services. For your electrical service you can make a service request to Duke Power at (919) 382-3200.

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

Line clearance pruning, while unsightly to many people, is necessary to ensure reliable power. The type of pruning that is used by Duke Power's line clearance contractors is called directional pruning, and has been scientifically proven to be the best way to prune for line clearance and maintain the health of the tree. For more information about Duke Power Company's tree trimming philosophy, check out: <http://www.duke-energy.com/safety/right-of-way-management/line-clearance-faqs.asp>. They have a clear explanation of the types of trimming they do and don't use.

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 25 feet or less. This way, the trees won't need to be trimmed for line clearance. For more information on tree species, see our [Recommended Tree Species List](#).

Will Urban Forestry plant a tree in front of my house?

You can request that a street tree be planted on the right-of-way by Urban Forestry by filling out this online form: <https://goo.gl/forms/IQDiBrMVDkwYt3Wi2>, but priority for allocating resources are now based upon environmental and demographic criteria. If your requested planting site(s) falls within a designated high priority area, there is a good chance resources will be allocated. If your request is for a location that is not within a priority area, your request may be placed on a waiting list or passed along to other tree planting organizations. If the planting goes forward, the City of Durham along with its non-profit partners can enter into a cost sharing partnership with you. You either pay \$10, \$25 or \$75 per tree, which represents approximately 50 percent of the wholesale cost of a "Bare Root" (\$10), "Containerized" (\$25) or "Ball and Burlap" (\$75) tree. Urban Forestry in partnership with Keep Durham Beautiful will pay the other 50 percent and plant the tree. We also require that you water the tree once per week during the growing season, and will provide more [detailed information](#) at the time the tree is planted.

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 storm water drain 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. 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 use commercially available products such as RootX. Urban Forestry will not remove a tree solely because of roots in lines, but may be in a position to permit the trees removal at your expense.

Tree roots have pushed up the sidewalk, the curb, or my driveway. Will you cut down the tree?

Tree roots will certainly contribute to pavement displacement, but they are often not the initial cause of the problem. There are a number of factors that contribute to pavement failure: the method of construction, type of soil under and surrounding the pavement, proximity of the pavement to the tree's buttress roots, and others. There are several things that can be done to repair the pavement and maintain the health of the tree. Urban Forestry will work with Street Maintenance to make repairs to the pavement in the most appropriate manner. Urban Forestry will not remove a tree solely because of pavement failure, but in some cases the factors of tree size, age, condition, and species along with the location of the pavement and other site conditions can result in the tree being removed after the repair if the roots are damaged and the tree does not survive the process.

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. Use Durham One Call (919.560.1200) to let us know where the intersection is and we'll do our best to solve the problem.

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

Urban Forestry will not remove trees for this reason alone.

Does Urban Forestry give away or sell the logs or wood chips its crews make? It would make great firewood or mulch.

Urban Forestry has a limited capacity to load wood chips for delivery to public entities, schools and non-profits for use on public or publicly accessible property (parks, schools, greenways, community gardens, etc.). Responsible parties attached to these agencies must arrange for the vehicles that will be performing the delivery. Deliveries to individual homeowners, neighborhood associations or homeowners associations are a violation of policy. All other debris that is generated (brush and logs) is legally disposed of under current best practices. At this point an alternative staging area for potentially useful wood is being set up for the use of Durham residents. Please visit the website for updates. As an alternative source, you may contact local private tree services and inquire about their wood and chip availability, sign up to wood delivery services like Chip Drop (<https://getchipdrop.com/>) or locate Duke Energy's contractors when they are active in your area and inquire with their foreman.

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 or removed. We generally will chip debris and dispose of wood as we go. The Solid Waste department will pick up this type of debris, and they have several different options for pickup. For more information, contact them at 560-4185.

A tree fell off of my neighbor's property onto mine. Can I make them come and clean it up?

When a tree falls on its own (it's not cut down) and it crosses property lines, the ownership of the tree is now divided at where it crosses the line. If it lands on your property, it is now yours. The owner of the property of origin is under no legal obligation to clean it up or dispose of it. If it fell from your property, you may request it to be returned, or you may request permission to retrieve it, but the new owner is likewise not obligated to agree to your request.

A storm blew a city tree down on my property. Will you come get it up?

No, trees and tree limbs that fall onto private property are not cleared or removed by City of Durham staff.

A tree fell from my yard across the road. What happens next?

Urban Forestry will clear the right-of-way and dispose of the debris. We will leave what fell in your yard in your yard. If it crosses the road and a section lands on another property, that portion too will be left.