

# Forestry FAQ

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# 1. **General Tree Care & Permits**

## **1.1 Why aren't stumps removed at the same time as the trees?**

We remove the stumps at a later date for a couple of reasons:

- Stump removal requires a separate large piece of equipment that the regular tree crews do not bring with them for every job. It is not needed when a crew is pruning trees, so it's not logical for them to tow it around to every job site if it is not needed. If they did bring the stump grinder, the rest of the crew would be waiting around for the stump grinding to be complete before everyone could move on to the next job.

- An OUPS ticket should be created and all utility lines identified and marked prior to the stump grinding process. The turnaround time on creating a ticket and getting the lines marked prevents us from being able to do this before every removal.

Also, it's important to note that Forestry does not do ground restoration after the stump has been removed (fill the whole in with dirt or add grass seed), they will only pack the cavity with grindings from the stump.

## 1.2 Are private homeowners allowed to remove or prune public trees?

It **is** possible for private parties to obtain a permit from Forestry to perform work on public trees themselves.

Here are some important things to know:

- Forestry permits are free.
- The cost of any work complete by the private property owner will not be reimbursed.
- All work must be performed by a professional tree care company. If the permit will involve pruning, the company **must** have an ISA Certified Arborist on staff.
- The application for the permit should be completed by the tree care company that will be performing the work. It is still the responsibility of the property owner to ensure that the proper permit is obtained prior to the work being completed.
  1. If a homeowner contracts a company to remove a tree and the company does not obtain a permit, Forestry will issue an invoice for mitigation to the homeowner.
- Forestry has the right to deny a permit application. If the permit is denied, the work shall **not** be performed.
  1. In general, Forestry does not permit removal of healthy trees.
  2. If a private party removes a tree without our permission, they will be subject to mitigation fees of \$260/diameter inch. So, a 10" tree would cost \$2,600, which would be billed to the property owner. If not paid, the matter is referred to the City Attorney's Office.
  3. If the party was advised that the permit was denied and they proceed with the removal anyway, Ohio Revised Code allows for further punitive damages beyond the \$260/diameter inch.

## 1.3 A very old tree was just cut down in a park. Why? Who decided to cut it down?

Forestry's ISA TRAQ Arborists (Tree Risk Assessment Qualified) conduct inspections for every 311 request that is received and they are the ones who determine if a tree should be pruned or removed.

The decision to remove a tree is never taken lightly. Forestry's goal is to preserve Columbus' tree canopy, but unfortunately some trees have suffered some sort of damage or have come to the end of their natural life cycle and must be removed.

## **1.4 Is it really going to take two years for you to do something about this tree?**

Not in every case. Our backlog is up to 24 months for lower priority work, but for high priority work we can respond much sooner. For emergencies, we generally respond within 3 days or less, and for other urgent work that we prioritize as ASAP, we respond within three weeks.

## **1.5 Who decides how to prioritize the work?**

Our ISA TRAQ Arborists determine what priority to assign to a work order during the initial inspection. TRAQ stands for Tree Risk Assessment Qualification. Arborists with this certification are trained to assess multiple factors during the inspection, including the conditions of the tree, imminent risk of failure, and what could be impacted if the tree fails. If the arborist assigns a lower priority to a work order, they have considered these factors and determined that, while work is needed, it should not be taken care of sooner than other open work orders that are older or include trees that pose a higher risk to the safety of the community.

## **1.6 Why aren't you removing all of these Callery/Bradford/Cleveland Pear trees?**

Callery Pear trees have been declared invasive, and are illegal to sell/purchase or plant in Ohio. Forestry does not have any plans to proactively remove any existing trees of this species, however. If the tree is healthy, it is still contributing to Columbus' overall tree canopy. Also, we do not have the manpower to remove healthy trees in addition to the current work that is in our backlog.

We also will not issue a permit for private property owners to remove Callery Pear trees if they are healthy and there is no other reason for removal.

## **1.7 Do I need a permit to plant a tree/remove a tree in my own yard?**

If the property is definitely private, no permit is needed to remove or prune any existing tree, or to plant a new one.

## **1.8 Developers are cutting down all of these trees to make way for new buildings. Can't you stop them?**

Columbus City Code currently does not include any rules or regulations regarding private trees, so we cannot intervene if a property owner plans to remove a healthy or significant tree on private property.

## **1.9 The tree in front of my house is infested with small bugs/fungus/disease/some other type of pest. Can you come treat it?**

Forestry does not treat or apply pesticide to street trees. Some homeowners choose to obtain a permit to continue to treat ash trees to protect from the Emerald Ash Borer. Homeowners who want

to treat a public tree for any of these kinds of pests should contact us for a permit before doing so.

## **1.10 There's a wasps' nest in the tree in front of my house/in the park. Can you remove it?**

Yes, Forestry will remove wasps' nest from public trees on the street or in parks, but only in areas where the public might be impacted. If a wasps' nest is in a park tree that is not near a heavily used area, or is high enough that it is not a risk to passers-by, we will not disturb it.

## **1.11 The tree has a blue/red X. Does that mean it's going to be removed?**

AEP will mark a tree with a red X if they plan to have their contractors remove it, these are usually private trees. Forestry will mark the tree with a blue X if we plan to remove it. **This is the only marking we will put on a public tree.** Sometimes residents in the neighborhood will tie ribbons around trees in honor of something. This usually isn't harmful to the tree, and they are either removed by the people who put them there or nature will take care of it.

# ***2.0 Tree Planting***

## **2.1 I requested a tree to be planted in February, it's now August. When will my tree be planted?**

Forestry only plants twice a year, in the Spring and Fall. While we do our best to honor all planting requests as soon as possible, we cannot guarantee how soon we will be able to include the request in our plans.

## **2.2 Can I choose which type of tree is going to be planted?**

We always try to honor resident requests for planting a specific species, but we cannot guarantee it for a number of reasons:

- Not all trees are suitable for every planting site. We consider factors like soil, size of the tree lawn, if there are power lines overhead, etc.
- Forestry will not plant or permit the planting of fruit trees in the right of way or a park.
- The requested species may not be available.

## **2.3 Why am I being asked to water the new tree if it belongs to the City?**

Unfortunately, Forestry does not have the resources to regularly water every new street tree that we plant. This is why we ask for residents' help during the first year of the tree's life.

## **2.4 Are private homeowners allowed to plant trees in the right of way?**

Private home/property owners can obtain a permit to plant in the city right of way.

Some important points:

- Any tree that is permitted and planted in the city right of way becomes the property of the City of Columbus and falls under the scope of Forestry. The property owner will not be reimbursed for the expense of planting a tree.
- A permit must also be obtained prior to any future maintenance being performed on the tree (pruning, fertilizing, pest treatment, etc.).
- If the tree has to be removed for any reason after it has been planted, the party that planted the tree will not be compensated for the cost or guaranteed a replacement.
- Forestry will conduct an inspection after the permit application has been received and determine if the area is appropriate for planting.
  1. Certain trees will not be permitted, such as fruit trees.

## **2.5. I got a door hanger saying that my curb was marked for planting. What does that mean?**

Throughout the year we inspect potential planting sites around the city to see if it's a good place for a new tree. If the site is a good one, we'll mark the curb (or ground, if there's no curb) with a white line to mark the intended planting spot. We send a postcard to the property address a little while later as a reminder. When it's finally time to plant, we get the utility lines marked by OUPS. When the OUPS flags go up, we have 14 days to get the tree in the ground.

If the homeowner needs to have the planting location adjusted, we can have the site inspected again and see if it can be shifted.

## **2.6 I don't want this new tree. Can you come remove it?**

If the tree is already in the ground, we will not remove it. If we are contacted prior to the planting, we will usually honor the refusal. If someone removes a new tree that was just planted, we will send an invoice to cover the cost of the damaged/destroyed tree.

## **2.7 Do I need to remove the stakes that are next to the tree?**

No need to remove the planting stakes, we will come take care of that after about 18 months. If the stakes are still there after that, please put in a 311 request to let us know.

# **3.0 Sidewalks/Foundations/Utility Lines**

### **3.1 The tree is ruining my sidewalk. Why can't you just come cut it down?**

Forestry does not remove healthy trees if the only concern is sidewalk damage. Residents should submit a request to Public Service's Sidewalk Repair Program for help with this kind of damage. If an address can be added to the list for future repair by this program, Public Service will consult with Forestry and if removal is recommended, Public Service will remove the tree and stump, and repair the sidewalk at no cost to the homeowner. The waitlist for this program can be very long, however.

- Even if the property is on the list for future repair, Forestry will not remove or perform any work the tree in the meantime.
- Questions about where a property is on this list should be referred to Public Service. Forestry will not have any updates or information.

### **3.2 What if I want to repair the sidewalk myself?**

If the resident wants to repair the sidewalk, they can contact Forestry for an inspection only when the damaged sidewalk has been removed and the tree roots are exposed. Forestry will conduct an inspection and determine if removal is necessary.

- *For internal reference: we will not conduct an inspection or approve removal of a tree until the homeowner has pulled all proper permits and the damaged section has been pulled up. This is to deter homeowners from "getting permission" to remove a tree and removing it but not actually following through with the sidewalk repairs.*

### **3.3 The city's tree roots damaged my sewer/water/drain line.**

Tree roots are not capable of damaging sewer or water lines that are in good condition. If a plumber has advised the resident that the tree roots are creating problems, the lines were already compromised and the roots were drawn to the water source. This can happen due to natural aging of the lines; sometimes unreliable materials were used when the lines were put in the ground.

Forestry will not remove healthy trees if the concern is that the roots are damaging or obstructing irrigation/drain lines. These types of lines should not be in the city right of way as Public Service does not issue permits for these types of lines.

- *For internal reference: tree roots alone are not capable of causing damage to water/sewer/drain lines. It is also extremely rare that tree roots interfere with a home's foundation. It would have to be a very large tree growing directly next to the foundation for it to cause a problem. If a homeowner claims that tree roots are causing damage to their foundation and want the tree removed, we will require that they consult with a structural engineer/building professional, and Forestry will also have an Inspector from Building and Zoning consult.*
- *For internal reference: Damage claims regarding irrigation/drain lines are always denied because they technically should not be in the right of way.*

### **3.4 I need to get my water turned back on, but the tree is in the way.**

If a public tree is preventing CWP from accessing the curb stop, they will contact Forestry directly

and the work will be prioritized. The private homeowner does not need to contact Forestry to make these arrangements.

## ***4.0 Powerlines***

### **4.1 The tree in my back yard is growing into the power lines. The City trimmed it a few years ago, can they come do it again? Or, the City tree is growing into the power lines, can they come address this?**

Forestry does not maintain trees on private property for any reason, or perform routine line clearance around power lines. AEP and City Electric both contract private companies that specialize in this kind of work and regularly maintain private and public trees that are near their power lines. Both agencies also have permits to maintain public trees that are near power lines.

Forestry technicians are trained to be able to perform work within a certain proximity to power lines, as required by federal law, but they do not perform regular line clearance. The agency that the resident saw pruning last time was likely a contractor working for AEP or City Electric. If the resident is concerned that the public tree is growing into the power lines, they can contact the respective agency to request maintenance.

### **4.2 There are vines or bushes growing into the power lines. Can you come take care of it?**

The resident should contact the utility provider for this kind of clearance, even if it's just vines or shrubs. No one should attempt to do any maintenance on or around a utility pole if they have not had proper training.

## ***5.0 Who Is Responsible?***

### **5.1 The City removed/pruned a tree and left everything behind. When will they come clean up?**

Forestry always removes any debris left after pruning or removing a public tree. AEP's contractor will leave large sections of private trees, usually logs from the trunk or large limbs, after they have worked on them. Forestry will **not** come remove this material, unfortunately.

If a contractor working for AEP or City Electric worked on a public tree, they are not supposed to leave any debris behind overnight, but some do. Generally, they will return the next day to clean up. Please let us know if something has been left behind longer than a day or two.

If Forestry is called to clear a private tree from the right of way or park, we may leave that material behind for the property owner to dispose of themselves. We'll clear the right of way may place the debris back on the private property.

## **5.2 The area behind my property is an easement. Does this make it the City's responsibility to maintain?**

Easements are not the same as right of way. Easements are an agreement concerning private property. Forestry does not maintain trees on private property for any reason, and will only get involved if a private tree is actively impeding the right of way.

## **5.3 What happens to the wood after a tree is cut down? Can I get some wood/mulch/wood chips?**

The wood chips that come from the trees that we remove are provided to Rec & Parks playgrounds, City of Columbus buildings, and community gardens that are planted on Land Bank properties. Unfortunately, we cannot distribute wood chips to private citizens.

Rec & Parks now has a program to repurpose the larger pieces of wood that come from public trees. This material is saved and used to make things like tables, desks, etc. for use in City of Columbus facilities. This material cannot be provided to the general public.

## **5.4 My neighbor's tree looks dangerous. Can you help with that?**

Columbus City Code does not provide us with any authority of private trees, unless they are currently obstructing the right of way. Issues regarding private trees is a civil matter. If the tree appears to be dead or dying, you can contact Code Enforcement. Currently, Code Enforcement can issue violation notices regarding hazardous trees on private property.

## **5.5 My/my neighbor's tree fell or dropped a huge limb on my property. Please come remove it.**

Unfortunately, we are not able to assist with removal on private property if the tree is private. The only time we can touch a private tree or any part of it is if it is impeding the right of way.

## **5.6 How can I find out if this is my tree or if it belongs to the City?**

Residents can refer to the Public Tree Inventory to see if a particular tree is public or private. This inventory does not include trees in alleyways, which sometimes are public. Residents can put in a request to have us take a look and try to determine ownership of the tree.

## **5.7 A bunch of trees/logs/branches fell into a stream/creek behind my house. Can you come remove them?**

Generally, this should be referred to CWP Water Reclamation, unless the water is within a CRPD property.

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