

## Frequently Asked Questions About Trees

The City of Tacoma receives hundreds of calls every year about trees. Below are some of the most common questions with answers. If you have a question that is not answered here, **please call 3-1-1 or (253) 502-2138. You can also submit a 311 request via Tacoma FIRST 311.**

### What do I do if I want a tree in front of my house?

[RTRE permits](#) are required for planting trees located in the public right-of-way. They are available at no cost at: [Tacoma Permits](#) .

You can plant a street tree through the Grit City Trees Program, which provides a free tree to residents that meet program criteria. The City provides the trees in the fall, and residents pick up the trees from designated pick-up locations. Residents can then plant the trees in the right-of-way. More information about the program can be found at [Grit City Trees](#).

If you would like to plant a tree in your yard, you can take advantage of the Tree Coupon Program, which provides interested residents with a discount on the purchase of a tree at a participating nursery. Learn more about this program by going to [Tree Coupon Program](#). No permit is required to plant trees on private property.

### What do I do if there is a dead/dying tree in front of my house? Is the City responsible??

If a tree in the public right-of-way is an imminent hazard, call 311 and request an emergency inspection.

The right-of-way is typically defined as an easement over the land where the right to possession of which is secured by the City for right-of-way purposes and includes the traveled portion of the public streets and alleys, as well as the border area such as: sidewalks, planting strips, traffic circles, or medians.

You can identify the boundaries of your right-of-way using this mapping tool: [Tacoma DART Map](#)

In accordance with Tacoma Municipal Code chapters 9.20, 8.30, 8.31, and 12.09, maintenance of trees and vegetation in the public right-of-way (ROW) is the responsibility of the adjacent property owner. However, in recognition of the need to encourage tree planting and proactive tree maintenance, as well as the need to address public safety without placing undue financial burden on community members, City Council passed a dedicated budget for a [Hazardous Tree Assistance Program](#)\*.

*\*This program only applies to trees located in the public right-of-way. Private property trees are ineligible.*

## What permits are needed to plant, prune, or remove a tree?

[RTRE permits](#) are required for planting, pruning, or removing trees located in the public right-of-way. For planting and pruning, these permits have no cost to the applicant. Fees may apply to certain removals. These requirements are detailed in Tacoma Municipal Code [chapter 9.20 Urban Forestry](#). More details on permitting can be found at: [Tacoma Permits — Tacoma Development Permits](#)

Permits are not required for planting or pruning trees on private property. Permits are required for removing trees on private property if the trees are located in a regulated Critical Area.

Critical Areas include the following: wetlands, streams, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, biodiversity areas, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas (such as steep slopes), and aquifer recharge areas.

If you have a Critical Area on your property, the Natural Resource group is a great resource to help you determine what to do next. If you would like more information about how to comply with [Tacoma Municipal Code Ch. 13.11](#), please reach out to the Critical Areas Specialists in the City's Planning and Development Services Department at (253) 591-5030 and follow the prompts to "Land Use and Zoning."

Permits are also required to remove trees on private property during development activities within Urban Residential zoning districts (formerly Single-Family Housing zoning). To learn more about requirements within Urban Residential districts review this [Home In Tacoma Development and Design Standards document](#).

## What do I do if a tree is growing into the power lines?

Never attempt to prune a tree that has grown into power lines. Tacoma Power prunes trees under high voltage wires on a regular schedule and responds to emergencies involving trees and overhead power lines.

For concerns about trees in overhead power lines, call [Tacoma Public Utilities Tree Line](#) at (253) 502-8729.

## Can you recommend anyone for tree work (planting, pruning, and/or removal)?

We recommend the use of a professional Arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). ISA maintains a list of certified Arborists here: [Find an Arborist](#)

## I have concerns about my neighbor's tree, what can I do?

If your neighbor's tree is in the public right-of-way, you can submit a 311 request via [Tacoma FIRST 311](#).

If the tree is on their private property, this is a private property issue that should be resolved among neighbors.

## I have concerns about a tree on City property, what can I do?

You can submit a 311 request via [Tacoma FIRST 311](#) or email [trees@tacoma.gov](mailto:trees@tacoma.gov). If possible, take photos of the tree(s) and include them in your submission.

### **I have concerns about a development removing trees, what can I do?**

You can submit a 311 request via [Tacoma FIRST 311](#).. If possible, take photos of the tree(s) and include them in your submission.

### **I have concerns about a possible illegal tree removal, what can I do?**

You can submit a 311 request via [Tacoma FIRST 311](#) or email [ncscscustsvc@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:ncscscustsvc@cityoftacoma.org). If possible, take photos of the tree(s) and include them in your submission.

### **I'd like the City to maintain trees in the right-of-way (planting strip, alley, etc..), is this something I can request?**

The City is not currently resourced to maintain trees within the right-of-way. In accordance with Tacoma Municipal Code chapters 9.20, 8.30, 8.31, and 12.09, maintenance of trees and vegetation in the public right-of-way is the responsibility of the adjacent property owner.

### **A tree is damaging sidewalks, what can I do?**

Tacoma Municipal Code, places the responsibility for sidewalk repairs on the adjacent property owner. If you have any questions about this aspect of sidewalk regulations, please reference TMC chapters 9.17, 10.18, and 10.20.

If the sidewalk is not adjacent to your property, you can submit a 311 request via [Tacoma FIRST 311](#). If possible, take photos of the tree(s) and include them in your submission.

If it is adjacent to your property, there are many ways to preserve a tree while repairing the sidewalk. The City of Seattle has compiled a useful guide here: [Tree and Sidewalks Operations Plan](#). The Solutions Guide begins on page 31.

When planting trees in the right-of-way, it's important to choose the "right tree for the right place." Avoid planting trees too close to a driveway or sidewalk. Large tree roots (which are typically larger with bigger trees) can lift and break pavement, creating hazards and additional repair costs. In Tacoma, the standard is a minimum distance of 2 feet from tree to pavement surface.

### **A tree is blocking my "view," can I remove it?**

You may not prune or remove a tree that is located on someone else's private property.

You may not "top" a tree located in the public right-of-way under any circumstance.

The City of Tacoma **does not** prune or remove trees to preserve views for public or private benefit.

There is a specific provision in Tacoma Municipal Code [Title 9 chapter 9.20.250 “Tree pruning on public real property – scenic view enhancement”](#) which outlines scenarios where the City *may* approve pruning or removal of trees located on City property, at the expense of the applicant.

If you wish to apply for a permit for any pruning or removal to be completed on a tree within a right-of-way or located on City-owned parcels, you may do so [here](#). Should the permit be granted, all conditions of the permit must be met and are subject to Tacoma Municipal Code 13.11. Any costs associated with the pruning or removal of a tree located in a right-of-way or on City-owned parcels for the purpose of view enhancement will be the responsibility of the person applying and may include costs associated with the labor and services of a bonded and certified arborist. Pruning or removal that does not meet the standards of the permit may be treated as a code violation and be subject to civil and criminal penalties and tree replacement. Topping will not be permitted.

**I believe a tree, not on my own property, is causing a public safety issue. What can I do?**

You can submit a 311 request via [Tacoma FIRST 311](#). If possible, take photos of the tree(s) and include them in your submission.

**A street tree is overgrown into the street, street lights, etc. what can I do?**

You can submit a 311 request via [Tacoma FIRST 311](#) . If possible, take photos of the tree(s) and include them in your submission.