PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION
Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

City of Portland
PP&R Urban Forestry Street Tree Pruning Standards

Portland Parks & Recreation Urban Forestry issues permits for all street tree pruning work within the City of Portland under the guidance of City Code 20.40 Street Tree and Other Public Tree Regulations. This document contains pruning standards to inform residents, contractors, business owners, city staff and others of acceptable street tree pruning activities.

Foundation for the Standards

City of Portland pruning standards generally reflect industry standards and acceptable best management practices for pruning as published in the "American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 Pruning Standards" and "International Society of Arboriculture Best Management Practices: Tree Pruning." In some cases the City of Portland standards are more restrictive than those in the publications above, given the City's goals of optimizing and enhancing the urban forest. This document provides standards specific to street tree work within the City of Portland. Educational information on pruning can also be found in the Portland Parks & Recreation brochure "Pruning and Care of Young and Mature Trees."

Tree Pruning Specifications

The word "shall" indicates a practice is mandatory. The word "should" refers to a practice that is highly recommended. The purpose of pruning is to develop and preserve tree structure, health, and the final appearance of the tree(s). Any person pruning a street tree shall do so in an appropriate manner, in order to maintain a tree form typical of the species or cultivar of the tree being pruned.

Pruning permit process

Any person intending to perform work on street trees must first obtain a Street Tree Pruning Permit from the City of Portland by contacting Portland Parks & Recreation's Urban Forestry division. Only an owner of the property abutting the street tree, or the owner's designee, may apply for a Street Tree Pruning Permit.

There is no fee for a permit to prune street trees. All work sites are subject to inspection before, during, and after work is completed.

Types of pruning

Pruning should only be done with a specific objective. To meet the objective(s) identified for a tree, one or more of the following types of pruning may be permitted by PP&R Urban Forestry: crown cleaning, crown raising, crown restoration, and young tree training. Each of these pruning types is described in further detail in *ANSI A300 Standards* and *Best Management Practices: Tree Pruning.* It is the responsibility of the person conducting the work to be familiar with each type of pruning, its benefits, and its limitations. Street Tree Pruning Permits will indicate one or more of the following types of pruning allowed under an individual permit:

- **Crown cleaning** is the removal of water sprouts and dead, dying, diseased, crowded, weakly attached, and low vigor branches from a tree's crown.
- **Crown raising** removes the lower branches of a tree in order to provide clearance for vehicles, pedestrians, and buildings. The City of Portland requires maintaining clearance standards 7½ feet above the sidewalk, 11 feet above residential streets, and 14 feet above main arterial streets.
- **Crown restoration** is used to improve the structure, form, and appearance of trees that have sprouted vigorously after being broken, topped, or severely pruned using heading cuts. Crown restoration may require several prunings over a number of years as new dominant branches take time to form.
- **Young tree pruning:** Young trees should be pruned to develop good structure, including a strong and well established central leader, strong branch attachments, and adequate spacing and distribution of scaffold branches. Young tree pruning will need to occur on an ongoing basis over the first ten years after tree planting.

A Street Tree Pruning permit may also allow additional specific activities outside of the above pruning types. In such cases, the allowed activity will be specifically noted on the permit. If not included on the permit, the activity is not allowed. Additional activities may include:

- **Weight reduction:** In order to reduce the likelihood of limb or trunk failure, proper pruning cuts at the end of limbs are used to reduce the weight of a limb.
- **Clear infrastructure:** Pruning to clear street light poles, buildings, stop signs, and other infrastructure.
- **Remove defective part:** Pruning to remove a specific defect.

Pruning cuts

- The three-cut approach to pruning, as described in the Portland Parks & Recreation brochure "Pruning and Care of Young and Mature Trees," shall be used to prevent tearing of the bark and vascular tissue.
- Branches shall be pruned at the branch collar or a lateral branch. Internodal pruning and leaving branch stubs are not permitted. Flush cuts are not permitted.
- Lions tailing is not permitted. Lions tailing is the improper practice of removing all or most secondary and tertiary branches from the interior portion of the crown, leaving most live foliage at the edge of the canopy.
- Topping is not an acceptable pruning practice and is prohibited. Topping is the reduction of tree's size using heading cuts that shorten limbs or branches to a predetermined crown limit.

Amount of pruning

- No more than 25% of the crown shall be removed within an annual growing season.

Tools and equipment

- Pruning tools shall be sharp and appropriately sized for the pruning cut.
- Equipment that will damage the bark and cambium layer shall not be used on or in any tree.
- Spikes or climbing spurs shall not be used for climbing trees during pruning operations.

Elm pruning requirements

In order to limit the spread of Dutch elm disease and comply with Oregon's state quarantine of elm wood, the following rules apply to the pruning of elm trees (*Ulmus* spp.):

- Elm trees shall not be pruned from April 15 through October 15 annually.
- Pruning tools shall be treated with a disinfectant before and after pruning individual elm trees.
- All wood waste shall be chipped or taken to an approved commercial disposal site within 24 hours of cutting.

Resources

ANSI A300 (Part 1)-2001 Pruning: Tree Care Operations - Tree, Shrub and Other Woody Plant Maintenance - Standard Practices (revision and redesignation of ANSI A300-1995, includes supplements). American National Standards Institute, Washington, DC.

ANSI Z133.1–2006. Standards for Arboricultural Operations: Safety Requirements. American National Standards Institute, Washington, DC.

Best Management Practices: Tree Pruning. 2002. Gilman, E. and S. Lilly. International Society of Arboriculture. Champaign, Il.

Portland Parks & Recreation. Pruning and Care of Young and Mature Trees brochure. http://www.portlandonline.com/parks/index.cfm?c=39712&a=179897