



PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION

Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

Guidelines for Affixing Ornamental Lighting in Trees

General

Persons, corporations, or associations shall be allowed to attach electrical wires, lights or other related devices for the purpose of holding ornamental lighting devices to any tree(s) growing within the public right-of-way area, provided they acquire a permit from City Nature's Urban Forestry Program and install and maintain the lights in accordance with the following policy.

Under no circumstances shall pruning of branches be permitted to accommodate the installation and/or the removal of electrical wires or lights. If any trees, tree trunks, branches or limbs on trees within the right-of-way are cut, pruned or damaged as the result of the lighting activity, the permit applicant shall be assessed for damages. The City shall be compensated the lost value of the tree based on the International Society of Arboriculture *Guide to Plant Appraisal* or actual cost of tree replacement, whichever is less. |

The City shall provide notice to the permit holder prior to scheduling any required tree maintenance activities to permitted trees. If electrical lights, wires, connectors or other devices are found on permitted trees after thirty-days notice has been given, they may be removed and discarded by the City.

The permit holder shall only be liable for damages due to the lights or related components on permitted trees. Damage to permitted trees caused by trucks, buses, cars or vandalism shall remain the responsibility of the adjacent property owner except where the City is responsible for the tree maintenance. (In the transit mall, for example, the trees are the responsibility of Bureau of Maintenance)

Standards for Seasonal Lighting

Seasonal lighting includes all lighting attached for 120 days or less.

1. Strands shall be installed at a height that does not impair or otherwise impede pedestrian traffic. When overhead power lines are involved in the tree, the strands shall not overhang sidewalks below 8 feet, per the National Electric Safety Code.
2. The Urban Forestry Program shall approve all lighting devices before installation: examples of acceptable lights include C9, C7, mini lights or LED cord lights.
3. Lights and related components such as attachments and electric cords shall be limited to those that blend in with the color of the tree bark and branches. The use of orange or red cords or attachments is not allowed.
4. Installation of seasonal lights shall be done in a manner that does not harm the trees. The preferred method of installation is "draping" or "tracing". These methods have been found to be the least harmful to trees.
 - i. The draping method may be used throughout the canopy and light strings shall be adequately secured and hung only on branches one inch in diameter or larger, to

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- minimize breakage.
 - ii. When using the tracing method for attaching lights, the strands shall be attached to the branch using stretchable nursery or grow tape. Lights may also be hung with tree ties so long as there is at least one half inch gap to allow adequate room for seasonal growth. All material used for attaching lights shall first be approved by the Urban Forestry Program of the City Nature Department. Examples of approved light attachments include: “Prolock1/2” Poly Chain Lock, Tyton Nylon ties (max. 50 lb tensile strength)¹ Plant Tie Ribbon, or nursery grafting tape.
- 5. Wrapping the light strings around the stem and branches is acceptable only under the condition that the strands are loosely wrapped to ensure there is no girdling or potential damage to the tree at any time. Adequate space shall be left between the branch and the strand to allow for branch sway during normal anticipated wind. Any lights found not having adequate space or otherwise causing damage to the tree shall be loosened or removed and replaced.
- 6. If at any time the lighting devices or their components become a safety hazard, they shall be removed.
- 7. All work on the lighting shall be performed while the trees are dormant. In general, work in the trees shall NOT be performed from March 1 through May 30 to prevent bark damage and to avoid injury to the developing leaf buds.
- 8. All old and non-functioning light strands shall be removed from the trees before new light strands are installed.
- 9. After a major storm event where tree damage may have occurred, the permit holder shall inspect the trees for damage and alert the Urban Forestry staff of any problems found.
- 10. Letter of Guarantee - A signed Letter of Guarantee to be held by the City is required for all permitted programs. The permit holders will reimburse the City for all tree-related damages caused by the installation, use, and removal of the ornamental lights.

Standards for Non-seasonal lighting

Non-seasonal lighting includes all lighting in place longer than 120 days but not to exceed three years. The non-seasonal lighting permit is renewable. Prior to the issuance of a non-seasonal lighting permit, a certified arborist shall conduct an initial survey of the trees to identify any tree defects or failure risks and ensure the tree’s suitability. Tree defects that require pruning shall be approved by the City Nature’s Urban Forestry Program before any work is performed. The permit holder shall provide an arborist or elect to have an arborist from the City Nature’s Urban Forestry Program. The Urban Forestry staff will conduct the inspection for a fee.

1. Strands shall be installed at a height that does not impair or otherwise impede pedestrian traffic. When overhead power lines are involved in the tree, the strands shall not overhang sidewalks below 8 feet, per the National Electric Safety Code.
2. The Urban Forestry Program shall approve all lighting devices before installation: examples of acceptable lights include C9, C7, mini lights or LED cord lights.
3. Lights and related components such as attachments and electric cords shall be limited to those that blend in with the color of the tree bark and branches. The use of orange or red cords or attachments is not allowed.
4. Installation of seasonal lights shall be done in a manner that does not harm the trees. The preferred method of installation is “draping” or “tracing”. These methods have been found to be the least harmful to trees.
 - i. The draping method may be used throughout the canopy and light strings shall be adequately secured and hung only on branches one inch in diameter or larger, to minimize breakage.
 - ii. When using the tracing method for attaching lights, the strands shall be attached to the branch using stretchable nursery or grow tape. Lights may also be hung with tree ties so long as there is at least one half inch gap to allow adequate room for seasonal growth. All material used for attaching lights shall first be approved by

¹ This works better for smaller branches; the poly chain lock is most often used for tree trunks.

the Urban Forestry Program of the City Nature Department. Examples of approved light attachments include: “Prolock1/2” Poly Chain Lock, Tyton Nylon ties (max. 50 lb tensile strength)² Plant Tie Ribbon, or nursery grafting tape.

5. Wrapping the light strings around the stem and branches is acceptable only under the following conditions:
 - i. The strands shall be loosely wrapped to ensure there is no girdling or potential damage to the tree at any time. Adequate space shall be given between the branch and the strand to allow for branch sway during normal anticipated wind. Any lights found not having adequate space or otherwise causing damage to the tree shall be loosened or removed and replaced.
 - ii. An inspection of each tree for adequate spacing between the strands and the branches shall be performed annually before the growing season begins (typically before March 1). A checklist report for each inspection shall be sent to the City Nature’s Urban Forestry Program within 30 days after the inspection, or elect to have an arborist from the City Nature’s Urban Forestry Program conduct the inspection for a fee. If the Urban Forestry Program does not receive a report, it shall contact the permit holder and then use its discretion to decide if an inspection is needed and may perform the inspection and bill the permit holder for the cost of the inspection.
6. If at any time the lighting devices or their components become a safety hazard, they shall be removed.
7. All work on the lighting shall be performed while the trees are dormant. In general, work in the trees shall NOT be performed from March 1 through May 30 to prevent bark damage and to avoid injury to the developing leaf buds.
8. All old and non-functioning light strands shall be removed from the trees before new light strands are installed. If within the permitted period lighting devices or their components become a safety hazard, they shall be removed. After a major storm event where tree damage may have occurred, the permit holder shall inspect the trees for damage and alert the City of any problems found.
9. Lights may be kept in City-owned trees on an ongoing basis, so long as the proper permits are secured and regulations are followed to ensure the health of the tree, public safety and compliance with applicable building codes. Urban Forestry staff will perform an annual visual inspection of all trees covered under the permit for the purpose of ensuring public safety and tree health.
10. Letter of Guarantee - A signed Letter of Guarantee to be held by the City is required for all permitted programs. The permit holders will reimburse the City for all tree-related damages caused by the installation, use, and removal of the ornamental lights.
11. Permit holders may appeal a decision for tree damages by filing an appeal to the Urban Forestry Commission, who will schedule a public hearing on the appeal.

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