



**PRINCETON**  
**DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**AND OPERATIONS**  
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## FAQs

### **1. Do I need a permit to plant, prune, or cut down trees on my property? If so, what are the penalties for cutting down a tree without a permit?**

No permit is needed for planting or pruning, as long as the pruning does not irreparably damage the tree. A permit is needed to remove any tree with a diameter at breast height (DBH) of 8 inches or greater or an ornamental or evergreen tree with a height of 10 feet or more. Residents should consult "[Tree Removal Information](#)" where they will also find a link to the application for a Tree Removal permit. An enforcement officer will respond within 20 days to grant or deny the application.

For penalties, please consult Sec. 22-16 of the Princeton Trees and Shrubs Ordinance adopted by Princeton Council in 2016 and amended in 2020. Each regulated tree removed without a permit is considered a separate violation.

Exceptions to the permit process include, among other conditions, dead trees that are standing and ash trees, due to the infestation of the Emerald Ash Borer. However, even in these cases, applicants should file permit applications before written permission is granted by the enforcement officer.

### **2. I think something might be wrong with my tree. Can I request that the Municipal Arborist visit my property to assess its condition or otherwise advise me on questions related to my private trees?**

No. The arborist is responsible only for the planting, care, and control of trees and shrubs upon and in the streets, highways, public places, public right-of-ways, and parks of the municipality. The New Jersey Board of Tree Experts provides a [list of arboricultural companies](#) (tree services) whose operators have Tree Expert and Tree Care Operator Licenses. Any person engaging in tree pruning, removal, and/or repair in the municipality can provide "Tree Care Services" in New Jersey only if registered with the New Jersey Board of Tree Experts.

### **3. How should I select a tree care company or specialist?**

The New Jersey Board of Tree Experts provides a list of "[Tree Care Services](#)" in New Jersey. The Shade Tree Commission cannot recommend one tree service company over another, but it does recommend that you solicit more than one estimate prior to hiring a company. You should ask *any* certified arborist for the following information:

- Proof of International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certification and licensing by the Contractors State License Board.
- Proof of New Jersey Tree Care Operator license (LTCO).
- Assurance that the arborist will be adhering to ANSI A300 Pruning Standards and ANSI Z133 Safety Requirements.
- Assurance that the arborist will NOT use climbing spurs (hooks and gaffs).
- A certificate of insurance that includes liability coverage for property damage as well as workers compensation insurance for all employees.
- A detailed written estimate.

**4. I want to plant a tree in my Princeton yard. I hear native (not imported) trees thrive best. What are the names of some native trees that grow well in our New Jersey climate?**

The Municipal Arborist recommends this [list of recommended native trees](#) and suggests that you take it with you to the tree nursery.

In addition, please consult the Nature Conservancy's fact sheet on "[Right Tree, Right Place](#)".

**5. May I prune the branches of a neighbor's yard trees if they overhang into my property?**

You should consult with your neighbor before taking any action, because trimming a tree improperly can cause damage to the tree. If you are unable to work with your neighbor for a resolution, and the tree poses a danger to your property, you should consult with an attorney and/or your insurance company. If damage has already occurred to your property or to the neighbor's tree, a consultation with your insurance company or an attorney may be required. The Shade Tree Commission does not have jurisdiction over disputes relating to trees found on private property.

**6. Which trees are the responsibility of the municipality, and which are mine?**

Those trees growing upon and in the streets, highways, public places, public right-of-ways, and parks of the municipality are protected and maintained by the municipality. All other trees are the responsibility of the property owner.

**7. What if tree roots are pushing up the sidewalk at my address? Who is responsible for trees that are blocking streetlights, traffic, and parking signs?**

For non-emergencies, report the problem [online](#); by contacting Princeton's Engineering Department (609-921-7077); or [emailing the arborist](#). Please describe the problem, and provide your address, cross street, and telephone number or email.

After municipal assessment, remedial action will be taken at municipal expense. For more information, consult municipal sidewalk regulations contained in Princeton Township Code Chapter 19, Streets, Sidewalks, Bike Lanes, and Shared Use Paths.

**8. How do I report a tree problem, like a large fallen branch or tree?**

If you are having a tree emergency--i.e., a tree has fallen--there may be power lines involved. Contact the Department of Public Works (609-497-7639), between 9a-3p, or the Police Department (609-921-2100) outside of those hours. Do not go near it.

If the problem is non-emergent, please report it [online](#) and the arborist will respond accordingly.

**9. What do I do with dead branches in my yard?**

Cut them into smaller pieces no more than 3 1/2 feet long, tie for collection, and place bundles curbside in accordance with your regular brush pickup schedule. If you hire a registered tree care company to cut down trees--whether live or dead--in your yard, the tree care specialists must be advised that they are required to dispose of all trees in accordance with current industry standards of proper disposal of trees.

**10. What is the best way to mulch a tree?**

Mulch around a tree should be spread like a donut, not a volcano. Never allow mulch to touch the tree's bark, and never pile it higher than 2 to 4 inches. Mulch too deep decreases the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide, which can lead to fungal and bacterial diseases. The mulched area should extend, where possible, to the drip line of the branches. It is best to mulch with wood chips or other coarse organic material. For more detailed, illustrated instructions, see "[Mulching Your Trees](#)".

**11. How do I report the address of a "public tree" or find it on the shade tree database?**

Please consult "[How to Look Up a Municipal Street Tree in the Princeton Tree Inventory](#)".

**12. Can I request a tree be planted curbside? How does the municipality decide on the type of tree to plant?**

If you have recently lost a street tree, or simply lack a street tree, the front of your property may be an ideal place for a young shade tree. Please contact the Shade Tree Commission. Following are some of the considerations the arborist takes into account when selecting a species of street tree for each location:

How tall or wide will it be when fully grown? How fast does the tree grow? Is the form appropriate to the spot? Will the tree have suitable sun and moisture conditions? Is the tree flowering and does it produce fruit? Will the tree grow clear of utility wires? Is the species native to this area?

**13. Can one attach nails or staples for posters on tree trunks?**

No. It is unlawful to attach anything to a street tree. See Sec. 22-6 of the Princeton Trees and Shrubs Ordinance, "Approval required for certain actions concerning trees and shrubs located on public streets, highways and right-of-ways, and property under municipality's jurisdiction."

**14. How can I donate a tree to the municipality or arrange to have a commemorative tree planted in the town?**

A detailed procedure on how to donate a tree will be available soon but you can [email](#) the Shade Tree Commission for more information. You may also want to view the "Adopt an Ash Tree" information to find out how to sponsor the treating of municipal ash trees or how to contribute to the [STC Tree Fund](#). And thank you!