



Pittsburgh's Urban Tree Renewal Program

The city's Forestry Division has been implementing a [master plan](#) for the care of city trees since late 2005. The plan itself was crafted by the Davey Resource Group (DRG) from Kent, Ohio. A city like Pittsburgh with over 900 miles of streets 'should' have 60,000 street trees, and 'could' have up to 90,000 street trees. However, Pittsburgh's inventory showed that we only had 31,524 street trees as of August 2005. At the same time as this discovery, we became aware that fully 10% of this number of trees required removal over the next four years because they had become a liability for the city.

As of March 2008, all of the Priority 1 Removals have been removed, and the Forestry Department is engaged in Priority 2 Removals slated for 2007-2008. There are also various pruning categories, stump removal, and of course planting. It is this last category that gets the attention of everyone, since trees are a welcome site to every street. However, while the plan calls for the introduction of new trees in every year of the 7-Year Plan, so far all financial resources have gone toward the most important removal and pruning work.

Planting Your Own Trees

In order to ensure the growth of our city trees while our resources are devoted to removing potentially harmful ones, residents can plant trees themselves on sidewalks adjacent to their property. To do so, you will need a permit for planting, so fill out the [Request for Permit – Tree Planting Form](#).  The City will provide a site analysis to make sure a tree fits your location, and we will provide guidance concerning acceptability of species. Check the [Planting Site Analysis](#)  checklist and diagram to see what standards need to be met when locating a tree adjacent to your property. As with city-planted trees, you also agree to water the tree during establishment, and maintain the planting bed. When you bear the cost of planting a tree on city ROW, the ownership of the tree defaults to the City. When the tree gets larger, the City will be responsible for pruning. If you plant a tree on your own, ALWAYS call [Pennsylvania One Call](#) to arrange for a location of underground utilities or obstructions. Their number is 800-242-1776, or you may simply dial 811.


Why do I need a permit?

City right-of-way (ROW) extends to the inner edge of the sidewalk, and sometimes well inside that sidewalk in cases where ROW is wider. You will need the expertise of Forestry Division staff to determine what area falls under city jurisdiction. All work on city property, including planting trees, requires a permit. This way we have knowledge of your activity on public property, and can provide input to your project. We seek to avoid creation of vehicular or pedestrian hazards, and ensure that utilities are taken into consideration. *The tree planting permit is a no-cost permit.*

Responsibility for maintenance

No matter whether the city plants a tree, or you do it on your own at your own expense, the adjacent property owner is responsible for watering through the 2-5 year establishment period. After that, you will only need to water during times of drought. You will need to keep the tree planting area weed-free for the life of the tree. You are also responsible for annual mulching. This will help to control weed growth, and will keep moisture in the root zone. Additionally, when you mulch the root zone instead of installing turf, there is no need to mow grass in an area where damaging the delicate trunk bark could spell disaster for a young tree.

How do I know what species to plant?

Forestry Division maintains an up-to-date [Recommended Species List](#)  to provide guidance concerning species. Trees planted in city ROW require careful forethought with regard to species in order to avoid future conflicts with overhead or underground utilities, vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and structures. For instance, only trees with a mature height of 25 feet or less may be planted under power lines. Conversely, where no impediments to growth are present, we like to plant shade trees in order to maximize every good reason for planting trees (oxygen production, shade, stormwater runoff, and etc.).

Links

- [Pittsburgh's Master Forestry Plan](#)
- [So You Want to Plant a Tree](#)
- [Responsibilities of Pittsburgh Forestry Division](#)
- [Why trees are beneficial](#)
- [Mulching trees](#)
- [Avoiding tree and utility conflicts](#)
- [Recognizing hazardous defects in trees](#)
- [Recommended Species List](#)
- [Planting street trees in Pittsburgh](#)
- [Pruning trees](#)
- [City Code re: Trees](#)
(type "trees" in the search box on the Municode page)
- [Web Resource Links](#)
- [Where do roots grow?](#)
- [City's tree inventory](#) 