



**Bureau of Buildings
Arborist Division**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. What is the Tree Protection Ordinance of the City of Atlanta? (Chapter 158, ACC, 1995)

It is the policy of the city that there shall be no net loss of trees within the boundaries of the city. The purpose of this article is to establish the standards necessary to assure that the policy will be realized.

http://www.atlantaga.gov/client_resources/government/planning/tree%20ordinance.pdf

2. What does the City of Atlanta Arborist Division do?

The Arborist Division enforces the city's Tree Protection Ordinance, including the permitting of trees on privately owned property.

3. Do I need a permit to remove a tree on my own property?

Any tree with a diameter at breast height (DBH) of six inches or greater requires a permit for removal; pines 12" or greater.

4. What is diameter at breast height (DBH)?

Diameter at breast height is a forestry measurement that is taken at 4.5 feet from the soil grade. Diameter can be determined by measuring the circumference of the tree with a tape measure and dividing by 3.14.

5. Do I need a permit to remove a tree on city property?

Permitting of trees for removal on City of Atlanta property is the jurisdiction of the Parks Department.

http://www.atlantaga.gov/government/parks/bureau_of_parks091703.aspx?section=Bureau%20of%20Parks

6. How do I obtain a permit to remove a tree(s) on private property?

It depends on whether the tree is on public or private property and why the tree is to be removed.

1. Dead, dying, or hazardous tree permit applications are obtained from the City of Atlanta Arborist Division. There is no fee for the application or the permit. The permit may be submitted electronically at <http://apps.atlantaga.gov/ebuilding/Arborist/treeRemoval1.asp> www.atlantaga.gov/government/planning/newarborist012706.aspx
2. Trees impacted by construction are permitted under the building permit. Plan review by the Arborist Division is required for this permit. <http://www.atlantaga.gov/government/planning/newarborist012706.aspx>

3. Trees may also be removed under a Landscape or Silviculture Permit. Plan review by the Arborist Division is required for this permit.
<http://www.atlantaga.gov/government/planning/newarborist012706.aspx>

7. Why do I need a permit?

The city manages the natural resource of the urban forest (defined as trees growing throughout Atlanta). To obtain the minimal loss of mature tree canopy the city requires a permit for removal. Trees that qualify as dead, dying or hazardous may be removed after the tree is inspected and conditions verified. Healthy trees that are removed under a construction, landscape, or silviculture purposes are assessed a recompense amount.

8. What is recompense?

Recompense is a dollar amount assigned to give value to a natural resource. It represents the lost public values of the trees removed. The equation that the City of Atlanta uses is $\$100(\text{number of trees}) + \$30(\text{total inches diameter at breast height})$. The number is positive for trees removed and negative for trees installed meeting replacement requirements.

$\$100 (\text{number of trees removed} - \text{number of trees replaced}) + \$30 (\text{total diameter inches removed} - \text{total caliper inches replaced})$

9. Where does the recompense money go?

Monies collected from recompense go into the Tree Trust Fund. This is a separate account that is controlled by the Tree Conservation Commission. These monies are to be spent on tree installation, maintenance, and environmental education.

10. Do I need a permit to prune my trees?

A permit is not required for the pruning of trees on private property. The Tree Protection Ordinance does set standards for the pruning of trees.

1. The tree cannot be climbed with spikes. Spikes can only be used if the tree is to be removed. The spikes leave wounds that give easy access for pests and decay organisms to infect the tree.
2. Cuts must be made just outside the branch collar. This is the area of swelling around the base of the limb. The branch collar contains the tissues that seal off the wound in a process called compartmentalization. This process is the natural way the tree 'heals' from the cut. Wound dressings are not needed and actually are detrimental to the tree.
3. Removal of the live canopy limbs cannot be more than 20 percent of the total live canopy of the tree. Dead limbs are not included in the twenty percent.
4. No topping of trees.
5. No tipping of branches.

11. What is topping?

Topping of a tree is when a leader branch is cut such as to remove the top of the limb and the main shoot (apical meristem).

12. What is tipping?

Tipping is the cutting of a lateral limb in such a manner as to leave a prominent stub extending beyond a branch node or the trunk.

13. Can I prune the trees on the City property, such as the right-of-way?

A permit is required to plant, remove or prune trees on the public right of way. Contact the Parks Department.

http://www.atlantaga.gov/government/parks/bureau_of_parks091703.aspx?section=Bureau%20of%20Parks

14. Can I remove limbs from my neighbor's tree that hang over my property?

All the requirements of pruning must be followed. To make the correct pruning cuts the tree may need to be accessed by using your neighbor's property. You will need your neighbor's permission to access the tree from their property. Cutting the limbs off at the property line and not the branch collar or not following any of the pruning standards is a criminal violation.

15. Do I need a permit for a tree that has fallen over?

A tree that has fallen and is being supported by the earth, another tree or a structure does not require a permit. Take photographs of the downed tree and keep. Contact the Arborist Division to notify the city of removal and the tree's condition. This is to protect you in the event of complaints of illegal removal.

16. Is there another way to remove a tree denied as dead, dying or hazardous?

1. Another permit process such as landscape/silviculture or construction may be pursued.
2. The denial decision may be appealed to the Tree Conservation Commission by contacting Helen Smith, (404)330-6874.

17. What are the repercussions of illegal removal/destruction or injurious pruning practices?

Violation of the tree ordinance is a criminal offense. For a first offense the minimum fine is \$500 and 90 days in jail per violation. For subsequent offenses the minimum fine is \$1000 and days in jail per violation. Each day's continuance of a violation may be considered a separate offense.

http://www.atlantaga.gov/client_resources/government/planning/tree%20ordinance.pdf

18. What are the criteria for a dead dying or hazardous tree?

The tree must have uncorrectable defects severe enough to pose present danger to people or buildings under normal conditions as determined by the City Arborist or City Forester.

19. What are the criteria for replacement trees for recompense credit?

1. Size – the smallest size accepted is 2.5 caliper inches (diameter of the tree measured 6" above ground level)
2. Spacing – overstory/shade trees must be a minimum of 35 feet apart, mid-canopy trees a minimum of 25 feet apart and understory trees a minimum of 15 feet apart
3. Species
 - a. credit is not given for the following types of trees: Leyland cypress, Bradford pear, crepe myrtle, silver maple, fruiting trees, large shrubs such as Ligustrum, Viburnum etc.,

Overstory/shade trees required before giving credit for trees maturing at a shorter height or ornamentals.