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The Complete Tree Maintenance Guide

A practical resource for homeowners, property managers & commercial property owners

A-Tree Service Inc. (651) 633-6835 atreeservices.com Family-owned in the Twin Cities for 40+ years

How to Use This Guide

This guide helps you make informed, proactive decisions about the trees on your property. It is not a substitute for an on-site assessment by a qualified professional — especially when a tree is near a home, roadway, utility line, playground or parking area.

THE GOAL

Move from reactive tree removal to planned tree stewardship. A small issue found early is safer, easier and less expensive to address than a failure discovered after a storm.

What you'll find inside

- Why proactive maintenance matters
- A simple tree inventory system
- Safe inspection & seasonal care
- Watering, mulching & pruning guidance
- Storm preparation & response
- Tree-risk warning signs
- Residential & commercial plans
- Questions to ask a tree company

Why Proactive Care Matters

1 Safety

Finds weak limbs, cracks and decay before failure — reducing avoidable injury and damage.

2 Property value

Maintains canopy, appearance and longevity, protecting curb appeal and investment.

3 Cost control

Schedules work before it becomes an emergency, making expenses more predictable.

4 Operations

Keeps roads, parking, signage and buildings clear — less disruption and liability.

5 Tree health

Improves structure, water access and growing conditions to extend useful tree life.

THE COST OF WAITING

Dead limbs fail without warning, overgrowth damages roofs and vehicles, and emergency work usually costs more than planned care.

Build a Simple Tree Inventory

Give each tree a unique number on a map, spreadsheet or notebook. For larger sites, divide the property into zones — north lot, main entrance, loading area, building perimeter or parking islands.

Record for each tree

- Tree ID & location
- Species / type
- Trunk diameter
- General condition
- Nearby targets
- Visible concerns
- Last service date
- Next review date

*Photos, **same angle each year**,
turn a static list into a record of
change over time.*

Priority levels

Routine

No obvious concern — reinspect seasonally.

Soon

Developing concern — evaluate within weeks.

Urgent

Significant defect near people or property.

Emergency

Active failure — keep clear, call for help.

SECTION 3

How to Inspect Safely

Walk around each tree from several directions. Use binoculars for the upper canopy and never stand beneath a cracked or hanging limb.

- 1 Ground & roots** Soil heaving, mushrooms, compaction or standing water.
- 2 Trunk** Cracks, cavities, decay, seams or wounds.
- 3 Branch unions** Split attachments, included bark, weak co-dominant stems.
- 4 Canopy** Deadwood, sparse or discolored foliage, broken tops.
- 5 Surroundings** Homes, walkways, roads, parking and utilities at risk.



Seasonal Tree-Care Calendar

Winter

Plan pruning; remove hazardous deadwood; protect young trunks. Schedule before spring demand.

Spring

Refresh mulch; begin watering if dry; inspect for pests and frost damage.

Summer

Deep water; inspect after storms; avoid root-zone traffic in high-use areas.

Fall

Complete inspections; prepare for winter; plant suitable species; budget next year.

Watering & Mulching

Water slow & deep

- Soak the whole root zone, not the trunk
- Apply slowly so it absorbs, not runs off
- Water early in the day
- Check soil moisture a few inches down
- Ease off as new trees establish



Mulch: donut, not volcano

- Use organic mulch such as wood chips
- Spread broadly over the root zone
- Keep it several inches off the trunk flare
- Moderate layer — never a deep mound

The trunk flare should stay visible and dry.

SECTION 7

Pruning with a Purpose

Every cut should have a defined goal. Poorly placed cuts can permanently damage a tree.

Good reasons to prune

- Remove dead or weak branches
- Build strong young-tree structure
- Clear buildings, walks & signs
- Improve entrance visibility
- Correct storm damage

Practices to avoid

- Topping or indiscriminate cuts
- Removing too much live canopy
- Leaving stubs or flush cuts
- Climbing spikes on kept trees
- Cutting near utility lines

Soil, Roots & Construction Protection

Roots are the most overlooked part of a tree. Many absorbing roots sit near the surface and extend well beyond the branch tips — compaction, trenching, grade changes and traffic cause slow decline.

Root-zone protection rules

- Establish a protected tree zone before construction begins
- Keep vehicles, dumpsters and soil piles out of the area
- Avoid trenching through major root zones when possible
- Don't add or remove soil around established trees
- Use mulch to reduce compaction in high-traffic areas

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TIP

Add tree-protection requirements to contractor scopes of work. A preconstruction tree meeting prevents costly root damage and disputes later.

Tree Health: Pests, Disease & Stress

Not every insect or leaf spot needs treatment — some issues are cosmetic, others cause real decline. Correct identification matters; avoid treating based on an internet photo or a neighbor's tree.

Common stress signals

- Smaller leaves or off-season yellowing
- Premature leaf drop or canopy thinning
- Dead branch tips
- Oozing, cankers or unusual bark changes
- Chewed leaves, holes or webbing
- Fungal growth near roots or trunk

An integrated approach

- 1 Identify the tree and the issue correctly
- 2 Judge whether it threatens health, safety or only looks
- 3 Improve water, mulch, soil and root conditions
- 4 Use targeted treatment only when appropriate
- 5 Monitor results and document changes



SECTION 10

Storm Preparation & Response

Before severe weather

- Inspect large trees near homes, parking & roads
- Remove known hanging or broken limbs
- Review dead trees and major cracks
- Move vehicles away from questionable trees
- Confirm emergency & after-hours contacts

After a storm

- Keep clear of hanging limbs & leaning trees
- Assume downed lines are energized — call the utility
- Photograph damage before cleanup when safe
- Prioritize access, life safety & utility hazards
- Have damaged trees professionally assessed

Understanding Tree Risk

Risk is more than a defect. It combines the likelihood of failure, the chance of striking a target, and the consequences if it does.

Tree condition

Deadwood, cracks, decay, weak unions, root damage



Exposure

How often is the area occupied — entrance, parking, playground?



Consequences

People, buildings, utilities, vehicles, operations

A dead limb over unused woodland is not the same risk as the same limb over a playground or building entrance.

Residential Maintenance Plan

Monthly in season Check moisture, leaf color, broken branches

After major storms Walk the property; photograph changes

Spring & fall Refresh mulch; inspect trunks & clearance

Every 1–3 years Professional inspection & pruning plan

Before construction Identify trees to preserve; protect roots



Commercial Property Plan

Commercial sites need documentation, prioritization and coordination — trees affect safety, access, signage, drainage and business continuity.

Core program elements

- Current tree inventory & property map
- Inspection frequency set by site use & exposure
- Risk-based work priorities & budget forecasts
- Clearance standards for buildings, signs & roads
- Storm-response contacts & escalation steps
- Contractor tree-protection requirements
- Service records with before-and-after photos

Hiring a Tree-Care Company

Compare qualifications, safety practices, scope clarity and insurance — not price alone. A low bid becomes expensive if the work damages your tree or property.

Questions to ask

- Are you fully insured (liability & workers' comp)?
- Will qualified professionals do the work?
- What pruning objective and method do you recommend?
- Will you avoid topping and use proper cuts?
- Who handles permits and utility coordination?
- Can you provide a written scope, price & schedule?

Red flags

- Pressure to remove a healthy tree
- Routine “topping” as maintenance
- No proof of insurance
- Door-to-door, cash-only storm demands
- Vague scope like “trim tree”
- Climbing spikes on a tree being kept

What to Do Next

What you see	What to do now	Who to contact
Branch on a power line	Stay away; don't touch tree or line	Utility / emergency services
Large hanging limb	Restrict access beneath and around it	Qualified tree-care company
Tree suddenly leaning	Keep people and vehicles away	Emergency tree-care service
Deadwood over a roof or walk	Schedule evaluation and pruning	Qualified tree-care company
Yellowing or thinning canopy	Check water & recent site changes	Tree-care professional
Construction planned near trees	Set protection zones before work	Tree-care & project team



Need a Professional Tree Assessment?

A-Tree Service Inc. helps homeowners, property managers and commercial organizations care for trees safely and proactively.

Tree trimming & pruning · Tree removal · Stump grinding · Land clearing · Tree assessments

(651) 633-6835

atreeservices.com

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