

CARING FOR YOUR TREES WITHOUT CUTTING THEM DOWN

BY CHERYL CORSON

People say some interesting and contradictory things about trees: they don't need any care; just like trees in the forest; they will grow to a certain height, then stop; they live forever; and they are going to fall on my house. In other words, they are immortal, invincible, AND deadly. Can all this be true? These questions came into sharp focus when the July 29 derecho came through town causing tremendous damage to and from trees.

This article will address some tree care basics. Hopefully as a result, your trees will get the care they need and deserve, and the neighborhood will continue to enjoy the many benefits of a healthy urban tree canopy. "Benefits!" you say? "A tree fell in my alley during the storm and I had no Internet for a whole week!" Yes, benefits.

Trees are Good for Us

The urban forest, as it's called, improves air quality by absorbing carbon dioxide (100 trees can remove two tons of CO₂ per year). It improves water

quality by absorbing water that would otherwise carry sediment into the Bay (35,625 tons of sediment per acre of trees). Urban trees moderate air temperature and can reduce home cooling costs by up to 30%. They have also been shown to raise property values. The DC-based national organization Urban Forests has great information on the value of trees (<http://www.americanforests.org/conservation-programs/urban-forests/>), as does the District Department of Transportation. DDOT is responsible for the District's trees. (<http://ddot.dc.gov/DC/DDOT/On+Your+Street/Urban+Forestry/Health+Care+to+Hot+Air:+Why+Urban+Forests+Matter>)

The Rules

"I don't care about all that," some will say. "I just know my tree is going to fall on my house and I want to cut it down."

Not so fast. DC has a regulation requiring a "Special Tree Permit" for removing trees with circumferences



This elm in the 200 block of 8th Street, SE came down in the Derecho. Photo: Cheryl Corson

greater than 55 inches, or a trunk diameter of 17.5 inches or more. See: (<http://ddot.dc.gov/DC/DDOT/Services/Tree+Services/Tree+Permits/Special+Tree+Permit>).

Plenty of trees are being removed in DC by DDOT. On the agency's web site, under "Tree Services Schedule", you can see a sobering list of dead and dying trees, including many on the Hill, and lots of old elms. But the city is also planting 4500 new trees each year, in an effort to renew the ecosystem.

Planting New Trees

The DC Department of the Environment's RiverSmart Homes Shade Tree Program will plant an unlimited number of trees on your property for only \$50 each. There is a list of approved native species from which to choose, and free assistance from Casey Trees in selecting and locating your tree. Of the trees on the list, I must say that although it's on the list, Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a very poor choice for any urban environ-

ment because of how easily their large branches snap in storms, and I don't recommend it. See: <http://caseytrees.org/programs/planting/rsh/>

Keeping Your Trees Alive

Especially in the first two years after planting, trees need regular watering, so if it does not rain 1.5 inches in a given week, you need to supplement. Casey Trees makes it easy though. They post weekly rainfall conditions online, and sell discounted slow-release watering bags. They even give you a free rain gauge if you take their pledge to water your trees (<http://caseytrees.org/get-involved/water/>).

Mulch only 2-3 inches, keeping the mulch a few inches away from the trunk so insects don't move in and chew the tasty bark, which can be fatal. Mulch in moderation conserves soil moisture, adds organic matter to the soil, and helps protect the tender bark from mowers and weed whackers.

Keep, or remove English ivy from tree trunks. No matter what you hear,



A pair of mature Redbuds grace this East Capitol Street garden. Photo: Cheryl Corson

ivy is not good for the tree. For a serious case, carefully cut climbing ivy roots from the trunk at 3 or 4 feet above the ground, and let the ivy above die back on its own to be removed later. Then manually remove the ivy from the lower section by hand, and keep after it. You will be doing your tree and our watershed a big favor.

Locating a Professional

If you suspect, or know you have a problem, don't get out your saw and do it yourself. Call a professional, especially if you want to keep your tree alive. There are a few organizations to which professionals belong that host searchable online member databases, for example the National Arborist Association, the International Society of Arboriculture, and the American Society of Consulting Arborists. Membership is no guarantee of quality, but it does imply a professional, long-term interest on the part of the arborist. Local independent arborist Keith Pitchford (<http://pitchfordtrees.com/>) points out the difference between an independent consultant and an arborist with a tree care company, saying, "There are some very good arborists within tree care firms, but many who are merely trying to generate work for themselves or their crews. Consultants [who may not necessarily do the actual tree work] are unbiased, and their income not dependent on the work being done."

Your arborist should be able to provide current certificates of insurance covering liability for damage to people and property during work, as well as workers' compensation insurance. Don't go with the low bid without checking qualifications and insurance. The widest price range of landscape service I've seen is in the area of tree work. If you use the same caution selecting a tree care professional as you would with a child care provider, you'll be well rewarded.

Cheryl Corson is a local landscape architect who loves trees. www.cherylcorsan.com. ★

Redefining Beauty One Client at a Time!

Over 20 years of experience



- Comprehensive Design and Maintenance Services
- Installation, arbors, retaining walls, walkways, lighting, water features
- Patios, roof top gardens, townhomes, single family homes
- Trees & shrubs, formal & informal gardens
- Custom Masonry, Fencing and Iron work
- Restoration and Enhancement

FALL GARDEN SPECIAL
(With This Coupon) exp 09/30/2012

10% off new clients and new installation

15% off any design



Derek Thomas / Principal
 Certified Professional Horticulturist, Master Gardener;
 Member of the MD Nursery and Landscape Association
 & the Association of Professional Landscape Designers



301.642.5182
www.thomaslandscapes.com

THOMAS LANDSCAPES
Full-Service Landscape Design & Maintenance Firm