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2024 DeKalb County

Homeowner Guide for Tree Removal

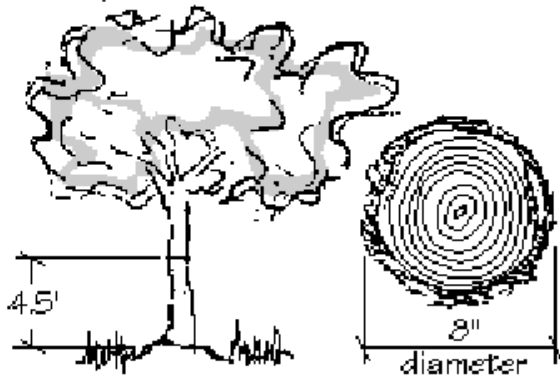
The DeKalb County Board of Commissioners has affirmed that the preservation of existing trees is a public purpose that protects the public health and safety, general welfare and aesthetics of the County and all its citizens.

The Board of Commissioners has given the County Arborist the responsibility to distribute educational materials on the procedures of the tree protection ordinance, the value of maintaining existing trees, and proper methods of tree planting, preservation and care.

DeKalb County requires that a **Notice of Tree Removal** request be submitted to the County Arborist for the removal of more than five (5) trees or specimen size tree (see below). The written notice request shall contain a health/risk assessment conducted by an ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) Certified Arborist, a Registered Consulting Arborist or registered/urban forester. The **Notice of Tree Removal** shall be submitted to the DeKalb County Arborist before tree removal operations. Failure to do so is a violation.

A **Notice of Tree Removal** is not required for any tree which has become, or threatens to become, a danger to human life or property as documented by a certified tree professional performing a tree risk assessment. Dead, diseased or hazardous trees may be removed at any time. This assessment shall be conducted by a certified arborist, registered consulting arborist or registered/urban forester.

According to DeKalb County code, a tree is defined as a living, self-supporting, woody perennial plant which has a trunk caliper of two (2") inches or more measured at a point six (6") inches above the ground and which normally attains a height of at least ten (10') feet at maturity usually with one (1) main stem or trunk and many branches.



County Code defines a significant tree as any existing, healthy, living tree eight (8") inches or more in diameter when measured four and one-half feet (4.5') above the ground. This measurement is referred to as diameter at breast height, **DBH**, of the tree.

Circumference of Trunk $\div \pi = \text{DBH}$

Ex.: 25" Circumference $\div 3.14 = 8"$ DBH



A **Notice of Tree Removal** is not required to remove any tree with a **DBH** less than 5".

The removal of up to five (5) healthy trees on a single-family residential property per calendar year is allowed without the submittal of a **Notice of Tree Removal** application, provided that these trees are not specimen trees.

The removal of more than five (5) trees or specimen tree(s), from an owner-occupied, single-family lot may be approved if the owner must remove trees in order to build a new structure, to

build an addition to or to make improvements to an existing structure, or to improve the health of other trees in the landscape. It is noted that additional permits, e.g. construction/building, clearing and grubbing, or land-disturbance permit, may be required.

Specimen Tree

A specimen tree is defined as a tree with a life expectancy of 15 years or more, with a healthy trunk with no extensive decay or hollow/cavity (less than 20%), and no major insect or pathological problem that meets the following size guidelines:

- Overstory (large) trees, ex.: Oak, poplar & pine – **DBH** is greater than or equal to 30 inches (which equates to a circumference of 94.2 inches).
- Understory (small) trees, ex: Dogwood, redbud – **DBH** is greater than or equal to 10 inches (which equates to a circumference of 31.4 inches).



Certified Arborist

You can find certified arborists/registered foresters in the yellow pages or by going to the ISA web site at <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx>, the Georgia Arborist Association, <http://georgiaarborist.org/>, or the Georgia Forestry Commission, <http://www.gfc.state.ga.us/community-forests/management/professional-assistance/index.cfm>.

Please note that special permits may be necessary if trees selected for removal are located within 75' of a stream or other water body/channel. In addition, trees should not be removed from a transition buffer. If trees are removed in a buffer then replanting shall occur for each tree that is removed.

Removal of more than five (5) trees but less than ten (10) trees may require a clearing and grubbing permit from the Department of Development and Sustainability.

Removal/clearing of ten (10) or more trees on residential property may be a land-disturbing activity requiring a Land Disturbance Permit. Before filing an application, the applicant shall meet with the County Arborist to discuss the procedure for approval of the tree removal including tree survey, protection, replacement and maintenance plans that may be necessary.

It is important to remember that no-land disturbing activities are allowed in the 75' stream buffer without a variance from DeKalb County. The 75' stream buffer must remain in its undisturbed, natural state of vegetation. Land disturbing activities are not allowed in the 25' stream buffer without a variance from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Environmental Protection Division.

DeKalb County code requires at least 1 or 2 trees in the front yard of zoned residential neighborhoods. In addition the Code requires each lot have an average tree density of 15 units/acre.

If you have any questions you may contact the DeKalb County Arborist at (404) 371-2685.



Guidelines and Procedures for Tree Removal

Permits, unless exempted otherwise by the County Arborist, are required for the removal of a specimen tree or the removal of more than five (5) trees with a **DBH** of more than 5” on residential, single-family, properties.

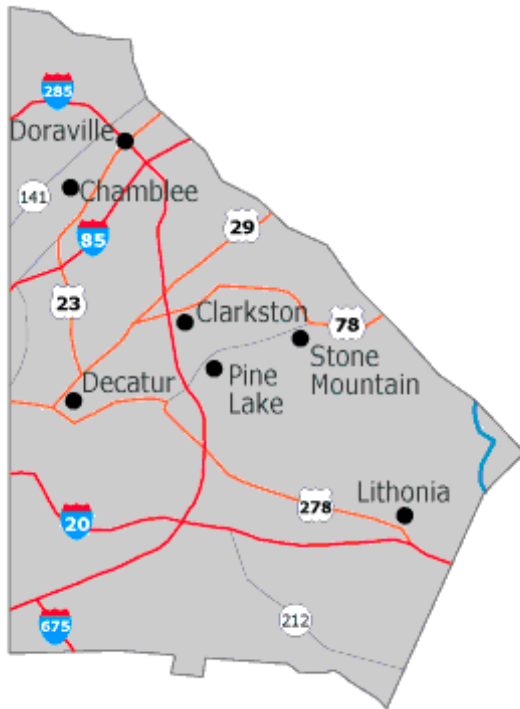
A **Notification of Tree Removal** is not required to remove any tree with a **DBH** less than 5” as well as dead, diseased or hazardous trees as assessed by a certified tree professional.

Trees must be removed within sixty (60) days after submittal of the **Notification of Tree Removal** and approval by the DeKalb County Arborist.

An alternative to the County Arborist conducting a site visit would be to contact an ISA Certified Arborist, a Registered Consulting Arborist with the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA) or a registered/urban forester. Having a professional to conduct an assessment will help expedite the permitting process.

The application review process will be no more than **five (5) working days** from the application’s receipt by the County Arborist.

Notification of Tree Removal Instructions



It is the responsibility of the applicant to know the governmental jurisdiction of the property where the tree(s) are located. Only unincorporated DeKalb County applications can be processed by the County Arborist. Please take note if you live in the jurisdictions of the City of Atlanta, Avondale Estates, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, Dunwoody, Lithonia, Stone Crest, Stone Mountain or Tucker.

The property owner(s), an ISA Certified Arborist, an ASCA Registered Consulting Arborist or registered/urban forester shall fill out the forms and **email the application, site plan, and any other material, including photos**, to the DeKalb County Arborist at rwtonning@dekalbcountyga.gov.

TREE CONDITION EVALUATION GUIDELINE

A tree's condition is determined by assessing the tree's roots, trunk, limb/branch structure, twigs and foliage. The conditions are identified on each component of the tree. This is a guideline only. It is recommended that the person conducting the assessment has an ISA Tree Risk Assessment (TRAQ) Certification or comparable training/knowledge/experience.

ROOTS

- ☐ ☐ Root anchorage.

- ☐ ☐ Restricted root system relative to canopy.
- ☐ ☐ Mechanical injury.
- ☐ ☐ Girdling roots.
- ☐ ☐ Compaction or water-logged roots.
- ☐ ☐ Presence of insects or diseases.

TRUNK

- ☐ ☐ Sound bark and wood, no cavities.
- ☐ ☐ Upright trunk (well tapered).
- ☐ ☐ Included bark between co-dominant stems.
- ☐ ☐ Mechanical or fire injury.
- ☐ ☐ Cracks.
- ☐ ☐ Swollen or sunken area.
- ☐ ☐ Presence of insects and diseases.

LIMB AND BRANCH STRUCTURE

- ☐ ☐ Strong attachments, no included bark.
- ☐ ☐ Free of decay and cavities.
- ☐ ☐ Well proportioned, good form.
- ☐ ☐ Wound closure.
- ☐ ☐ Dead limbs/epicormic sprouting.
- ☐ ☐ Presence of decay, insects and diseases.

TWIGS

- ☐ ☐ Shoot vigor compared to past 3-year growth.
- ☐ ☐ Presence of weak or dead twigs.
- ☐ ☐ Presence of insects and diseases.

FOLIAGE

- ☐ ☐ Normal appearance (size, color, density).

- ☐ ☐ Nutrient deficiencies.
- ☐ ☐ Herbicidal, chemical injury symptoms.
- ☐ ☐ Wilted or dead leaves.
- ☐ ☐ Presence of insect or disease.

- **Reason(s) for removal(s):**

- **Addition to a Single-Family House:** (must include scaled site plan depicting location of proposed addition and tree(s) to be removed).
- **Pool:** (must include scaled site plan depicting location of pool/pool deck on property and tree(s) to be removed).
- **Retaining Wall or Fence installation.**
- **Septic Tank and/or Well:** (must include Public Health Department Permit and approved site plan).
- **Unhealthy or Damaged Tree(s):** Includes but is not limited to insect or fungal damage, lightning strike, inadequate area for healthy growth.
- **Other** (specify).

The Recognition of Hazardous Trees

Pollards

Often indicated by a sudden change in stem diameter. Decay may be present but hidden by regrowth.

Break-out cavity

Decay may develop in wounds caused by branches breaking.

Weak fork

Tight V-shaped crotches may be structurally weak, sometimes giving rise to cracks; decay can develop in them.

Pruning wounds

The wound surface or a layer of paint (if present) may appear sound but the wood behind may be decayed.

Loose bark

Bark coming away from the stem may indicate the presence of rotten wood beneath.

Basal cavities in the wood

These are particularly dangerous if present between more than one pair of buttresses.

Damaged roots

Site disturbance may sever or kill roots; poor soil conditions may lead to restricted rooting. Tree stability may be affected.

Leaves (or needles). Dead twigs and branches

Generally small, sparse or pale. Tree flushes late or drops its leaves early. These symptoms sometimes indicate root decay or death.

Perennial or target canker

Such cankers may result in weakness of branch or stem.

Abrupt bends

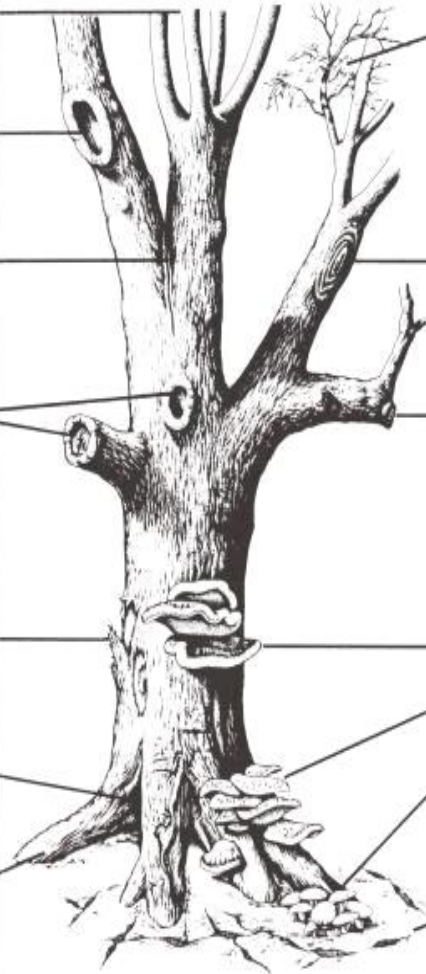
Resulting from past breakage or pruning. Decay may be present.

Fungal fruit bodies

Bracket fungi on the stem are positive indicators of internal decay. Fruit bodies on or near roots may indicate they are decayed, but the species of fungus should be identified as many harmless or beneficial kinds also grow in this area.

Soil cracks

Heaving of ground may occur when a tree with an unstable root system moves in a wind.



Courtesy of <http://arbtalk.co.uk/>