PROVIDENCE CITIZEN FORESTERS HANDBOOK
PROVIDENCE CITIZEN FORESTERS

is a project of the Providence Parks Department Division of Forestry

Administred in partnership with the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program

It is made possible through the generous support of the Raleigh-Providence Tree Care Trust of the Rhode Island Foundation
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SECTION 1. WHAT ARE CITIZEN FORESTERS (& WHY DO WE NEED THEM?)

Young and newly planted trees require care in order to survive and thrive. Approximately 600 or more new trees are planted each year along Providence’s streets and in its parks. While City tree crews do all they can to keep up with the maintenance of our urban forest, these young trees often do not get the optimal amount of care and attention in the first 3–5 years of growth, a critical stage in their development.

Through the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP) and other networks, a robust community of dedicated and engaged urban forest advocates already exists in Providence. One way to extend our capacity in this realm is to empower those already engaged and knowledgeable residents (you!) as Providence Citizen Foresters, and offer technical training focused specifically on structural pruning and the care of young, urban trees.

After successful completion of the training, participants receive certification authorizing them to engage in pruning and maintenance of these young trees.

To launch Providence Citizen Foresters (PCF), the Parks Department is contracting with PNPP, as the City’s long-standing partner in increasing and stewarding our urban tree canopy, to administrate the program in coordination with the Forestry Division.

A healthy urban forest is invaluable to the health of our city—to improve air and water quality, lower air temperatures, reduce energy use, and make our streets more beautiful. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our most vulnerable trees get the care and attention they need, and we hope PCF will allow our existing tree community to grow, work together, and become ever-stronger advocates for our city’s urban forest!
SECTION 2. “It’s Not Easy Being Green!” The Challenges Facing Urban Street Trees

Our street trees face an array of challenges and threats unique to the urban environment—threats they are particularly vulnerable to before they are well established. Some of the primary environmental challenges our young trees face include:

• **Intentional Human Vandalism** – Damaging or girdling bark, uprooting or snapping whole trees

• **Unintentional Human Damage** – Car doors slamming into trunks, vehicles running into trees, trucks hitting low branches, well-intentioned but inexpert “pruning” of trees

• **Waste** – Garbage and dog waste accumulated in tree pits

• **Drought** – Insufficient watering, plus little un-paved, permeable surface area to allow for water absorption.

• **Poor & Compacted Soil** – Urban Soils become seriously compacted from heavy traffic and construction. This further prevents water absorption, and makes it hard for nutrients and oxygen to reach the tree roots.

• **Road Salt & Pollutants** – Trees in high-salt soils can have even more difficulty absorbing water, and salt-affected trees often show symptoms of water stress. Heavy metals and other pollutants from high vehicle traffic can also negatively impact street trees.
SECTION 3. BAILIWICK & BOUNDS (WHERE AM I ALLOWED TO PRUNE!?)

Per the City Tree Ordinance, “A permit shall be required for planting, spraying, pruning, cutting above ground, removing, or otherwise disturbing any tree on any street, park, or other public place.” Authorized PCFs however, will be permitted to engage in tree care and pruning in accordance with the PCF guidelines:

Street Trees

• PCFs are authorized to perform maintenance of streets trees planted on city right-of-ways (grass strips, sidewalks, medians)

• PCFs may prune any trees they may reach while standing at ground level, or with a pole saw/pruners (no extension poles)

• PCFs must get proper permissions, and report all completed work to PCF administrators. If pruning more than 3 trees at one time, PCF administrators must be notified in advance

• If these trees are in front of private residences or businesses, especially single-family homes, PCFs must do one of the following:

  o Receive verbal permission from the property owner or a representative whenever possible OR,
  o Leave an “opt-out” Tree Maintenance Notification card (template provided) prior to doing any work OR,
  o Receive permission from the City Forester or the Citizen Foresters program administrators

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1 Chapter 23 ⅔ of Part II Providence Code of Ordinances
https://www.municode.com/library/ri/providence/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR_C H23_1-2TR
Parks

• PCFs are authorized to work on trees located in City Parks and on other City properties under the following circumstances:
  
  o When participating in an official Citizen Forester outing
  o In coordination with the appropriate Neighborhood or Park “Friends Association”
  o With prior-authorization from the City Forester or the Citizen Foresters program administrators

• PCF authorizations are valid for 5 years, after which participants must be recertified.
SECTION 4. SAFETY & LIABILITY

Climbing in trees is prohibited, as is the use of ladders or stepstools. All pruning and maintenance is strictly “feet-on-the-ground.”

Using any motorized or mechanical devices in tree maintenance is prohibited.

Cutting of any tree limbs above non-extension-handle pole-saw reach is prohibited.

Never cut tree limbs or branches that are touching wires, cables, or other electrical infrastructure.

Whenever possible, work in pairs!

All PCFs must sign the PCF Participant Liability Waiver in order to be fully authorized.
SECTION 5. EQUIPMENT & TOOLS

When engaging in any activity related to Citizen Foresters tree care, CFs are responsible for making sure they are using the appropriate tools and wearing the appropriate protective gear.

Approved Tools/Equipment:
- Hand Pruning shears
- Hand Pruning Saw (Maximum 10” Blade)
- Soil Cultivators
- Shovels/Rakes
- Pole Saw/Pruners (no extension handles)

Prohibited Tools/Equipment
- Chainsaws
- Pole Pruners
- Pole Saws
- Mechanical or Electrical Weed Whackers, Hedge Trimmers or Pruning Tools

Required Gear:
- Close-toed footwear
- Work Gloves
- Hat
- Natural Fiber Twine

PCF will provide tools/equipment for training sessions and some organized group outings. At all other times, equipment/tools are the responsibility of the Citizen Foresters.

These are the basic tools we recommend for young tree care:
- Bypass-style Hand Pruning Shears
- Pull-Stroke Hand Pruning Saw (curved blade, no more than 10” long, folding or fixed)
- Hand Cultivator

All cutting blades should be kept clean and sharp!
Purchasing Pruners/Saws: There are many options available for both of these items, depending on how much you want to spend. Some things to keep in mind are the ability to sharpen/replace blades, your hand size, how much you plan to use them/ergonomic features. If you are ordering pruning tools online, here are some good places to source from:

- Forestry Suppliers www.forestry-suppliers.com

(Ask us for more guidance/recommendations if you are unsure what to purchase!)

Bypass Pruners

Folding Saw

Fixed Blade Saw

Hand Cultivators
SECTION 6. TREE-PIT CARE

The tree-pit or lawn strip is usually the only bit of soil an urban tree’s vast roots network gets access, so making sure it is as healthy and nurturing as possible is key!

• Using a hand cultivator, loosen the top 2-3 inches of soil to counter compaction and help water and air reach the roots.

• Do not add soil to tree pits above original soil level (this can smother & rot roots/trunk) or remove soil below planting level (this can disturb shallow roots).

• Apply a three-inch layer of mulch—preferably wood chips or shredded bark—to the entire pit (or a 4’x6’ area if possible). Do not pile the mulch against the root flare or trunk of the tree; water will accumulate and rot the trunk.

• Remove unwanted competing plants.

• Mulch will absorb road salt throughout the winter. When possible, especially on highly trafficked roads, remove mulch from tree pit in the spring and replace with fresh mulch.
SECTION 7. STRUCTURAL PRUNING: TRAINING A YOUNG TREE

Proper pruning is essential in developing a tree with a strong structure and desirable form. Trees that are pruned while they are young will require less corrective pruning as they mature!

Establishing a Central Leader & Strong Scaffold Structure:

• A good structure of primary branches should be established while the tree is young. Many of the branches present on a young tree at planting time will be pruned away at maturity, to provide clearance for mowing, pedestrians, and/or vehicle traffic, but it is important to determine early on which trees will form the future structure of the tree.

• The goal in training young trees is to establish a strong, central leader (trunk) with sturdy, well-spaced branches, both radially (around the trunk) and vertically (up and down the trunk). These limbs, called scaffold branches, will form the framework of a mature tree.

Proper pruning cut location is critical to a tree’s health and wound closure response:

- Stub Cut (too far out from branch collar) - NO!
- Flush Cut (inside of branch collar) - NO!
- Correct Cut (just outside of branch collar) - YES!
• Always make pruning cuts just outside the branch collar to avoid damaging the trunk and compromising wound responses. (The branch collar is the swollen area where the branch connects to the trunk.) Improper cuts may lead to permanent internal decay.

• If a large branch must be shortened, prune it back to a secondary branch or a bud. Cuts made between buds or branches may lead to stem decay, sprout production, and misdirected growth.

• To prevent tearing of the bark and vascular tissue, use the three-cut method whenever you are cutting branches over an inch thick.

“The Three Cut Method”

“THE THREE CUT METHOD”

Cut 2
Saw down through branch

Cut 1
Partially cut up into branch 1/3 to 1/2 of the way through

Cut 3
Saw through branch just outside the branch collar

The Three Stages of Pruning a Tree:

Stage 1 – Crown Cleaning:
“The 3 D’s & 2 S’s” (Dead, Damaged, Diseased, & Stubs & Sprouts!) Removing all this stuff is the very first thing you should do.
Stage 2 – Limb Raising & Clearance:
Making sure all branches are out of the way of Pedestrians, Cars, Stop Signs, & Buildings. This is the time to identify future scaffolds, and remove competing leaders. (Don’t remove more than 1/3 of the trees foliage in one season!)

Stage 3 – Structure:
“The 3 Cs” (Crowding, Crossing, & Crotches!) This will usually be done in a later season from the first 2 stages, and is when you remove branches that are heading back into the tree, rubbing together, or have narrow crotch angles.

Other Misc. Pruning Notes:
• When in Doubt, Don’t Cut!
• Just Say “NO” to Topping & Lion-tailing!
• Remove suckers from around the base of the tree whenever they emerge!

Pruning Debris & Cleanup:
After pruning, all wood debris must be cut into 4’ lengths, bundled with twine, and left to be picked up with municipal yard waste. If you are planning a group outing, remember to notify PCF in advance, and we will arrange for members of the forestry crew to come and collect the debris.
SECTION 8. OUTINGS & FIELDWORK

While many of you will engage in a lot of solo tree-care while out-and-about in your neighborhoods and on your regular rounds, one of the benefits of PCF is the ability to make significant impact on a particular spot.

PNPP & Forestry will coordinate some of these outings, and you are also encouraged to organize group outings of your own. (Think of a street that you know is itching for some tree TLC, and then imagine what a difference a flash-mob of 10 or so Citizen Foresters working for an hour-and-a-half could make—taking turns and rotating to a different neighborhood every month?!) If you are coordinating a tree-care outing, make sure you have notified the Providence Citizen Foresters administrators and received the appropriate neighborhood permissions!
SECTION 9. Tracking & Reporting

It is very important that all of the work accomplished by Providence Citizen Foresters, whether done solo or on an organized group outing, is tracked and recorded—this is both to measure our impact, and better manage the urban forest, by knowing where we need to expand/increase our efforts:

• All tree maintenance must be recorded and reported to PCF, via the online submission form on the Citizen Foresters page of the PNPP website.

• Report tree maintenance you have done as soon as it has been completed. (It is a good idea to carry a small notebook with you or use your phone to track your work as you go.)
SECTION 10. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

As Citizen Foresters, you will be acting as agents of the City and of the trees within it! You will often be the “face” of tree stewardship out in the neighborhoods, fostering a positive relationship with your fellow residents. (Further engaging and educating the public about the value of our urban forest is one of the goals/benefits of Providence Citizen Foresters.)

If for any reason you encounter tension or conflict with any member of the public while working in your capacity as a Citizen Forester, the first priority is to de-escalate the situation. Thank the resident for their concern and move on to the next tree. Report relevant details to PCF after the fact.

Your love of trees, and your commitment to their wellbeing, is one of the most valuable assets our urban forest has.

Thank you for being a protector and friend of the trees!
Date___________________

Hello!

My name is ________________________________, and I am a Providence Citizen Forester. The Providence Citizen Foresters are a group of skilled volunteers trained and authorized by the Providence Parks Department Forestry Division to help prune and care for our city’s young street trees.

I am working on trees in this area, and would love to perform some basic maintenance pruning on the tree/s in the public right-of-way in front of your property.

Please let me know if for any reason you would prefer we NOT prune these trees! I may be reached at:

Tel:__________________________________________________

Email:________________________________________________

Thank you!

If you have general questions or would like to learn more about the Providence Citizen Foresters program, or go to www.pnpp.org and click on the Providence Citizen Foresters link!