

THE
PROVIDENCE
COMMUNITY
TREE
KEEPERS

HANDBOOK



PROVIDENCE COMMUNITY TREE KEEPERS

is a project of the
**Providence Parks Department
Division of Forestry**

Adminstrated in partnership with the
**Providence Neighborhood
Planting Program (PNPP)**

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It is made possible through the generous
support of the
**Raleigh-Providence Tree Care
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Foundation**



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SECTION I. WHO/WHAT ARE TREE KEEPERS (& 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 Community Tree Keepers*, and to offer technical training focused specifically on structural pruning and the care of young, urban trees.

The Providence Parks Department contracts with PNPP, the City’s long-standing partner in increasing and stewarding our urban tree canopy, to administrate the Providence Community Tree Keeper (PCTK) program in coordination with the Forestry Division. After successful completion of the training, participants receive certification authorizing them to engage in pruning and maintenance of these young trees.

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 the PCTK program 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 unpaved, 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. WHERE & WHAT 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.”¹ Authorized PVD Tree Keepers however, will be permitted to engage in tree care and pruning in accordance with the PCTK guidelines:

Street Trees

- Tree Keepers are authorized to perform maintenance of streets trees planted on city right-of-ways (grass strips/tree lawns, sidewalks, medians)
- Tree Keepers may prune any trees they may reach while standing at ground level, or with a pole saw/pruners (no extension poles)
- Tree Keepers must get proper permissions, and report all completed work to PCTK program administrators. If pruning more than 3 trees at one time, PCTK program administrators must be notified in advance
- If these trees are in front of private residences or businesses, especially single-family homes, Tree Keepers must do one of the following:
 - Receive verbal permission from the property owner or a representative whenever possible **OR**,
 - Leave an “opt-out” Tree Maintenance Notification letter (template provided on the PCTK page of the PNPP)

¹ Chapter 23 ½ of Part II Providence Code of Ordinances

https://www.municode.com/library/ri/providence/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR_C H23_1-2TR

website, at www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers) prior to doing any work **OR**,

- Receive permission from the City Forester or the PCTK program administrators

Park Trees

- PVD Tree Keepers are authorized to work on trees located in City Parks and on other City properties under the following circumstances:
 - When participating in an official PCTK outing
 - In coordination with the appropriate Neighborhood or Park “Friends Association” (contact info for park friends groups is on the “[For Current Tree Keepers](#)” page of the PNPP website, at www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers)
 - With prior-authorization from the City Forester or other PCTK program administrator.
- PVD Tree Keeper certifications are valid for 5 years, after which participants must be recertified by the program administrators.

SECTION 4. SAFETY & LIABILITY

Climbing in trees is prohibited, as is the use of ladders or step stools. *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 PVD Tree Keepers must sign the Providence Community Tree Keepers *Participant Liability Waiver* in order to be fully authorized.

SECTION 5. 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.
- Whenever possible, remove mulch from tree pit and replace with fresh mulch in the *spring*, especially on highly trafficked roads. (Mulch will absorb road salt throughout the winter!)

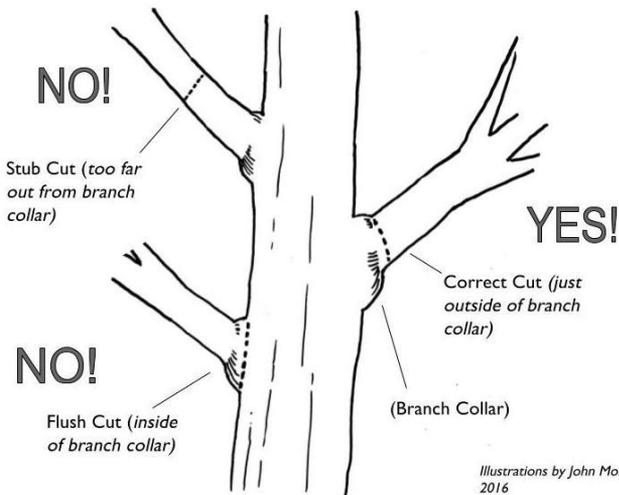
SECTION 6. STRUCTURAL PRUNING: TRAINING A YOUNG TREE

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:

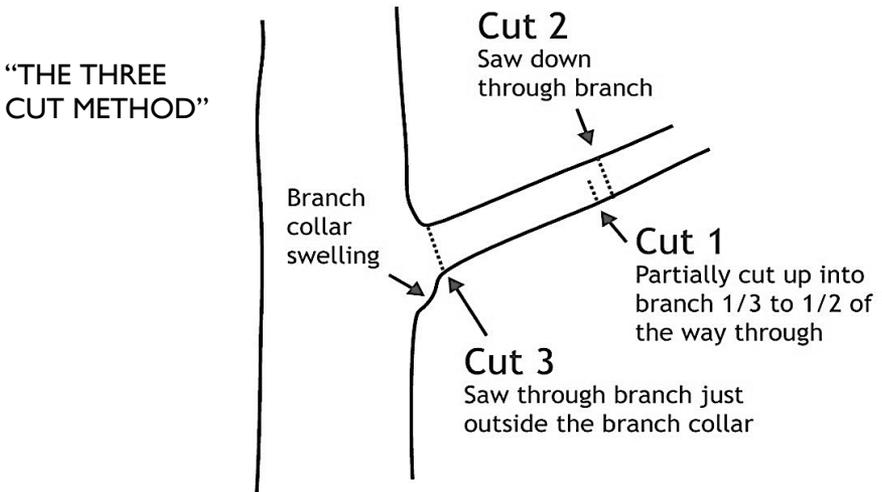
- A good structure of primary branches should be established while the tree is young. Many of the branches present on a young tree at planting time will be pruned away at maturity, to provide clearance for mowing, pedestrians, and/or vehicle traffic, but it is important to determine early on which trees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



Illustrations by John Morra,
2016

- 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 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:

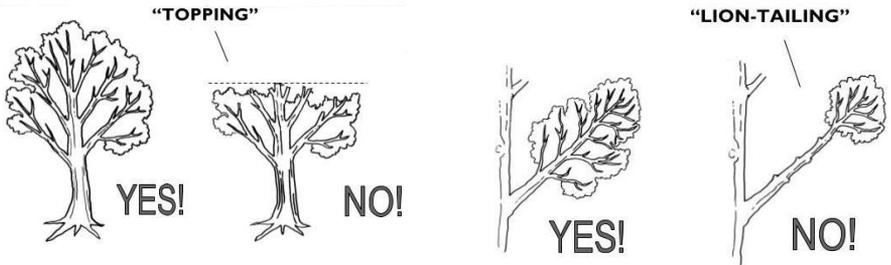
Making sure all branches are out of the way of Pedestrians, Cars, Stop Signs, & Buildings. This is the time to identify future scaffolds, and remove competing leaders. (Don't remove more than 1/3 of the trees foliage in one season!)

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!



Illustrations by John Morra, 2016

Pruning Debris & Cleanup:

After pruning, all wood debris must be either put in yard waste bags/containers or cut into 4' lengths and tied into bundles with biodegradable twine, and left curbside to be collected with municipal yard waste. *If you are planning a group outing or pruning many trees, and expect to produce more debris than you can practically leave for pickup, you can notify PCTK program admins in advance, and we will arrange for members of the forestry crew to come and collect the debris. In that case, you should NOT tie the debris with twine!*

SECTION 7. EQUIPMENT & TOOLS

When engaging in any activity related to PCTK tree care, PVD Tree Keepers 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

PCTK will provide tools/equipment for training sessions and some organized group outings. At all other times, equipment/tools are the responsibility of the Tree Keeper.

These are the basic tools we recommend for young tree care:

- Bypass-style Hand Pruning Shears
- Push/Pull-Stroke Hand Pruning Saw - Curved blade (folding or fixed), no more than 10" long (8" is best).
- 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, and how much you plan to use them/ergonomic features.

Felco brand pruners and handsaws are some of the best—though they are on the pricier side. Some other good brands to look for are Bahco, Banel, Corona, ARS, or AM Leonard. (Keep in mind that each brand offers different lines, and price/quality/features will vary between lines.) For detailed reviews on hand tools you can also check out www.gardeningproductsreview.com.

If you are ordering pruning tools online, here are some good places to source from:

- Oesco, Inc – Conway, MA, www.oescoinc.com
- Forestry Suppliers www.forestry-suppliers.com

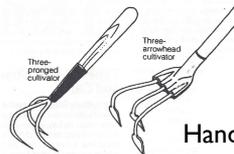


Bypass Pruners

Folding Saw



Fixed Blade Saw



Hand Cultivators

SECTION 8. OUTINGS, COLLABORATION & FIELDWORK

While many of you will engage in solo tree care while out-and-about in your neighborhoods or on your regular rounds, one of the benefits of the Providence Community Tree Keepers program is the ability to pool our efforts and make significant impacts on particular spots particularly in need of maintenance!

PNPP & Forestry will coordinate some group PCTK outings, and you are also encouraged to organize outings of your own! (Just 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 Tree Keepers working for an hour-and-a-half could make—taking turns and rotating to a different neighborhood every month?!)

There is a PCTK Google Group/Email Listserv to allow Tree Keepers to stay in touch, share information & updates related to urban tree stewardship, and coordinate group tree-care outings. You will be automatically added to the group once you are certified, but you may always access it directly at:

<https://groups.google.com/d/forum/pvdtreekeepers>

[If you are coordinating a group tree-care outing, make sure to notify the PCTK program admins and procure the appropriate neighborhood permissions beforehand!]

SECTION 9. TRACKING & REPORTING

It is incredibly important that all of the work we accomplish through the Providence Community Tree Keepers program—whether individually or through organized group outings—is tracked and recorded!

This will allow us to measure our impact overall, as well as better manage our urban forest by knowing where & when we need to expand or focus our efforts!

To that end, please report all tree maintenance you do through the simple online submission form on the Providence Community Tree Keepers page of the PNPP website: www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers/
Or email it to info@pnpp.org, with “Providence Community Tree Keepers Tree Work Reporting” in the subject line.

Submit tree work to us as soon after you have completed it as possible. (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

Further engaging and educating the public about the value of our urban forest is one of the tenets and benefits of the Providence Community Tree Keepers program.

As Tree Keepers, 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, and working to foster a positive relationship with your fellow residents in regard to our urban forest.

If for any reason you encounter tension or conflict with any member of the public while working in your capacity as a PVD Tree Keeper, 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 the PCTK administrators after the fact.

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

**THANK YOU for being a friend &
protector of the trees!**



Date _____

Dear Neighbor,

My name is _____, and I am a volunteer-member of **Providence Community Tree Keepers**—a group of residents trained and authorized by the Parks Department’s Forestry Division to engage in feet-on-the-ground pruning and maintenance of our City’s young street & park trees.

The goal of our pruning is to provide adequate clearance over streets, sidewalks, driveways and homes (in accordance with [Providence’s Municipal Tree Ordinance](#)), as well as to maintain the health and vigor of our city’s trees.

I am currently working on trees on your street, and will be doing some maintenance pruning of the tree(s) in front of your residence/business. (All pruning debris will be removed from site.) If for any reason you would prefer that maintenance or pruning **NOT** be done on these trees, please let me know! I may be reached at:

Tel: _____

Email: _____

The Tree Keeper program is managed by the [Providence Department of Parks & Recreation-Forestry Division](#), in partnership with the [Providence Neighborhood Planting Program \(PNPP\)](#). It is made possible through a grant to the City of Providence from the *Raleigh-Providence Tree Care Trust of the Rhode Island Foundation*.

If you would like more information about Providence Community Tree Keepers, visit www.pnpp.org or contact info@pnpp.org or (401) 368-5380. If you have general questions about the urban forest or our city’s street trees, you may contact the Forestry Division at: (401) 785-9450.

Thank you!

