

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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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 care and attention in their first 3–5 years of growth—a critical stage in their development.

Through the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP) and other networks, a community of dedicated and engaged tree advocates already exists in Providence. One way to increase our tree stewardship capacity is to empower those already engaged and knowledgeable residents (*you!*) as *Providence Community Tree Keepers*, by offering technical training focused specifically on the structural pruning and care of young trees.

The Providence Parks Department contracts with PNPP, the City’s long-standing partner in tree planting and care, to administrate the Providence Community Tree Keeper (PCTK) program in coordination with the Forestry Division. After successfully completing the training, participants receive certification authorizing them to engage in pruning and maintenance of these young public trees.

A healthy *urban forest* (which is what we call *all* of the trees collectively, across every part of the city) is invaluable to our human and ecological health: to improve air and water quality, to lower air temperatures, reduce energy use, improve mental health, and make our streets more beautiful. *We look forward to working with you to ensure 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, connect, and become ever-stronger advocates for Providence’s urban forest!*

SECTION 2. IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN! THE CHALLENGES FACING URBAN STREET TREES

Our street trees face many challenges and threats in the urban environment—especially when they are young, and not yet well established. **Some of the main challenges they face include:**

- *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 from absorbing, and also makes it hard for nutrients and oxygen to reach the tree roots. (oxygen is almost as important as water for growing tree roots!)
- *Intentional Human Vandalism* – Breaking branches, damaging or girdling bark, uprooting or snapping whole trees
- *Unintentional Human Damage* – Car doors slamming into trunks, vehicles running into trees, large trucks hitting low branches, well-intentioned but inexperienced “pruning” of trees
- *Waste* – Garbage and dog waste accumulated in tree pits
- *Road Salt & Pollutants* – Trees in high-salt soils can have even more difficulty absorbing water. 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’s Municipal 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 Certified 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 the city right-of-way (grass strips or tree lawns, sidewalks, medians)

- If these trees are in front of private residences or businesses-- especially 1-3 family residences, 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 website, at www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers) prior to doing any work **OR**,

 - Receive permission from the City Forester or the PCTK program administrators for that site.

¹ Chapter 23 ½ of Part II Providence Code of Ordinances
https://www.municode.com/library/ri/providence/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR_CH23_1-2TR

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
 - If coordinating with the appropriate Neighborhood or Park “Friends Association” (contact info for park friends groups is on the “[For Current Tree Keepers](http://www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers)” page of the PNPP website, at www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers)
 - With prior-approval from the City Forester or other PCTK program administrator

- Tree Keepers may prune trees they can reach while standing on the ground, or with a pole saw or pole pruners.

- Tree Keepers must get proper permissions, and report all completed work to PCTK program administrators. If pruning more than 10 trees at one time, PCTK program administrators must be notified in advance.

- PVD Tree Keeper certifications are valid for 5 years, after which participants may 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 must be strictly “feet-on-the-ground.”**

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

Cutting of any tree limbs above a pole-saw’s reach is prohibited.

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

Whenever possible, work in pairs!

SECTION 5. 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, folding recommended)
- Soil Cultivators
- Shovels/Rakes
- Pole Saw/Pruners (with up to one extension handle)
- Long handled “loppers” are good for breaking-down branches or pruning off root sprouts, but should not be used for primary pruning cuts

Prohibited Tools/Equipment

- Chainsaws
- Pole Pruners or Pole Saws longer than 1 telescoping length
- Mechanical or Electrical Weed Whackers, Hedge Trimmers or Pruning Tools

Other Gear:

- Closed-toe footwear
- Work Gloves
- Hat
- Natural Fiber Twine

PCTK provides 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 (with a cutting capacity of at least ¾” diameter, and preferably 1”)*

- Push/Pull-Stroke Hand Pruning Saw – straight or curved blade, folding or fixed. No more than 10” long (7” or 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, Barnel, 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



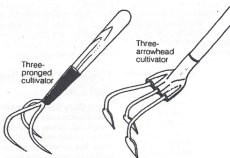
Bypass Pruners



Folding Saw



Fixed Blade Saw



Hand Cultivators

SECTION 6. TRACKING & REPORTING

It is so 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 overall urban forest, by knowing where & when we need to expand or focus our efforts!

To help us with this, ***please report all tree stewardship you do through the simple online submission form on the Providence Community Tree Keepers page of the PNPP website:*** [www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers/!](http://www.pnpp.org/currentpvdtreekeepers/)

Or email it to info@pnpp.org, with “Providence Community Tree Keepers work” in the subject line--or text or call us to let us know! (We don’t care *how* you report it to us, we just want to know record the work you all do!) Your reporting doesn’t have to be too exact. Specific addresses are great, but if you’re not sure you can also just say: “*This month I weeded and pruned 4 trees on Oak Ave, between Maple St and Elm Ln!*”

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 7. OUTINGS, COLLABORATION & FIELDWORK

While many of you will do solo tree care while out-and-about in your neighborhoods, one of the benefits of the Providence Community Tree Keepers program is the ability for us to connect to other tree advocates, and to pool our efforts and make significant impacts in spots that are *especially* in need of maintenance! This is one way we can work to achieve “tree equity”, and ensure that we have a vibrant, healthy, well-managed urban forest in *every part of the City*.

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 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 larger group tree-care outing, make sure to notify the PCTK program admins, and get the appropriate neighborhood permissions beforehand!]

SECTION 8. PRUNING DEBRIS AND CLEANUP

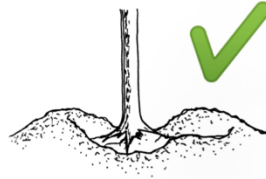
After pruning, all wood debris must be either put in yard waste bags/containers or cut into 4' lengths and tied into bundles with biodegradable twine, and left curbside to be collected with municipal yard waste.

*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. **(If forestry will be collecting the branches, you should NOT tie the debris with twine!)***

SECTION 9. TREE-PIT CARE

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

- 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 bacteria and insects can rot and damage the trunk bark!
- Remove grass and unwanted competing plants from around the base of the tree. (It's ok to leave flowers or other plants that someone planted in the pit on purpose!)
- Whenever possible, remove mulch from tree pit and replace with fresh mulch in the *spring*, especially on highly trafficked roads. (Mulch absorbs road salt throughout the winter!)



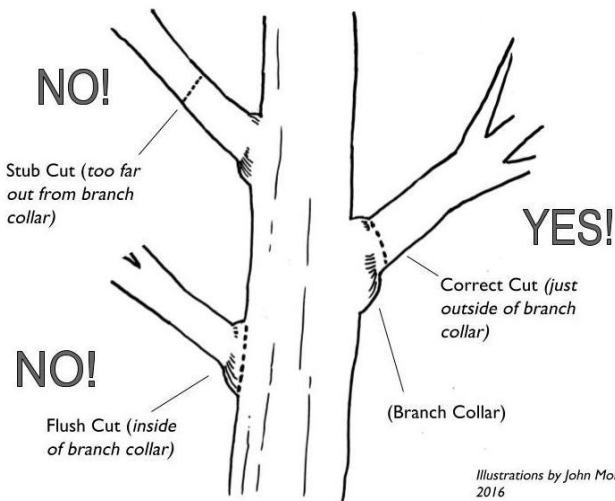
SECTION 10. STRUCTURAL PRUNING: TRAINING A YOUNG TREE

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!

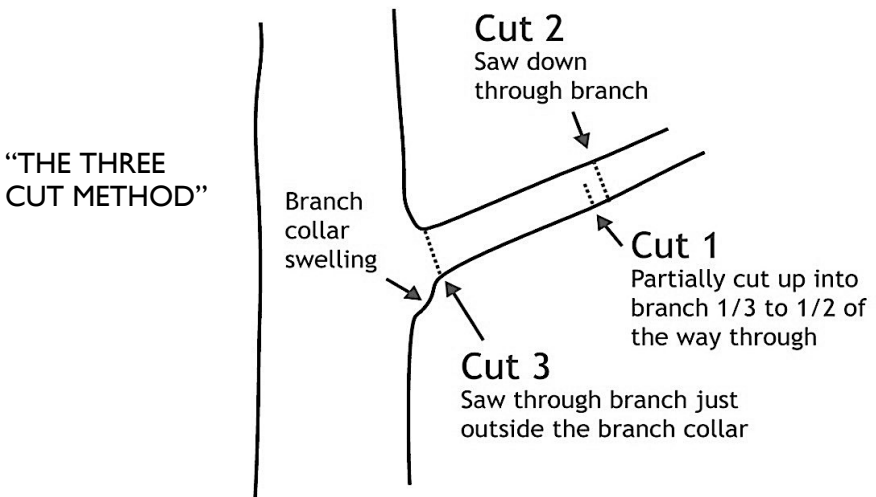
Establishing a Central Leader & Strong Scaffold Structure:

- 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 single 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:



- 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.

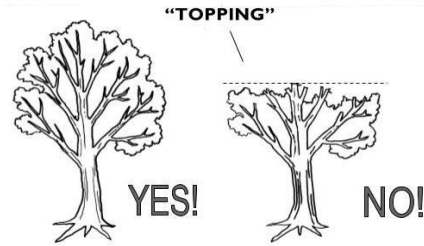
Stage 3 – Structure:

“The 3 Cs” (Crowding, Crossing, & Crotches!) This will usually be done in a later season, maybe a year after you do the first 2 stages, and is when you remove branches that are heading back into the tree, rubbing together, or have narrow V-shaped crotch angles.

Remember: Don’t remove more than ~25% of the crown (i.e. all of the branches/leaves that are above the main trunk) of a tree in one season!

Other Misc. Pruning Notes:

- *When in Doubt, Don't Cut!* (You can always come back to prune it next year!)
- Just Say “NO” to Topping & Lion-tailing!
- Remove suckers or “root sprouts” from around the base of the tree whenever they emerge!



Illustrations by John Morra, 2016

SECTION II. COMMUNITY RELATIONS & ADVOCACY

Engaging with and educating our neighbors and the public about the value of trees and the urban forest is one of the key 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 we ask you to work to foster a positive relationship with your fellow residents in relationship to our shared 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 them for their concern and move on to the next tree. You can refer them to us if they have questions or concerns. 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 with the **Providence Community Tree Keepers**, a program where residents are trained and authorized to help prune our city's young street and park trees, and maintain street tree pits.

Proper pruning helps make sure tree branches stay clear of streets, sidewalks, driveways and homes (in accordance with [Providence's Municipal Tree Ordinance](#)), and also helps keep our city's trees healthy and resilient!

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 branches and debris will be removed from site.) If for any reason you would prefer that tree pit care or pruning NOT be done on these trees, please let me know! You can reach me at:

The **Providence Community Tree Keepers** program is administrated by the Providence Department of Parks & Recreation's Forestry Division, in partnership with the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP).

For more information about PVD Community Tree Keepers:
www.pnpp.org / info@pnpp.org / (401) 368-5380

If you have general questions about Providence's street trees, contact the City Forestry Division at: (401) 785-9450.



Fecha _____

Querido vecino,

Mi nombre es _____,
y soy voluntario con los **Providence Community Tree Keepers**, un grupo de residentes capacitados y autorizados por la División Forestal de Providence a podar y cuidar los árboles jóvenes en las calles y parques de nuestra ciudad.

Podando los árboles correctamente asegura que las ramas se mantengan alejadas de las calles, aceras, y casas (de acuerdo con la [Ordenanza Municipal de Árboles de Providence](#)), ¡y también ayuda a mantener los árboles florecientes!

Estoy podando árboles en tu calle, y podaré el (los) árbol(es) frente a tu hogar/negocio. Si por alguna razón **NO** quieres que yo podo/cuide los árboles, avísame. Me puedes contactar en:

El programa **Providence Community Tree Keepers** es administrado por la División Forestal del Departamento de Parques de Providence, en colaboración con Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP).

Para más información sobre PVD Tree Keepers: www.pnpp.org / info@pnpp.org / (401) 368-5380

Se tienes preguntas generales sobre los árboles de calle en Providence, llama a la División Forestal: (401) 785-9450.

NOTES:

A series of horizontal dashed lines providing a space for handwritten notes.