

Yard Tree Placement and Risk Assessment

Why is it important to properly place trees?

Trees provide many benefits for you and your home when placed and planted properly. Trees provide color and beauty in your yard, attract wildlife, help reduce heating and cooling costs, and improve mental health. Properly placing your tree helps ensure that the tree has enough growing space, nutrients, and sunlight. Improper spacing can lead to poor-quality trees, damage to homes, damage to sidewalks and roads, and problems with utility line rights-of-way. Placing trees too close to a home or utility line can also increase the risk of fire and threaten personal safety.



How much space does a tree need?

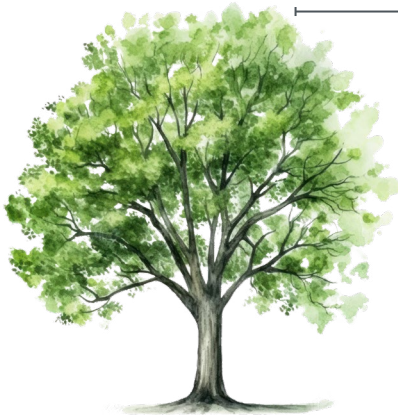
The general rule of thumb is that tree roots extend out at least 1.5 times the crown diameter of the tree. In dry areas, it can be up to 5 times the crown diameter. Trees need plenty of space to grow so their roots will not impact other plants or grow into foundations, sewer systems, roads, or sidewalks. Proper placement depends on size:

- Small trees should be planted at least 8–10 feet away from walls and other trees. Small trees are preferable around power lines, as they are less likely to need topping or pruning. Small trees include eastern redbuds, flowering dogwoods, and red buckeyes.
- Medium trees should be planted at least 15 feet away from walls and other trees and at least 20 feet from power lines. Medium trees include hawthorns, magnolias, and holly trees.
- Large trees should be planted at least 20 feet away from walls and other trees and at least 50 feet from power lines. Large trees include maples, oaks, and pines.



Tree topping can lead to structural decay and health problems. It is better to have the tree removed than to top it. Plant small trees in areas where there is a chance that future height growth could be problematic.

20+ feet from walls and trees, 50+ feet from utility poles



Large Trees
(40+ feet tall at maturity)



Medium Trees
(25–40 feet tall at maturity)



Small Trees
(<25 feet tall at maturity)

15 feet

8–10 feet



Woody Vines & Herbaceous Plants
(<5 feet tall at maturity)

What should I look for when assessing tree risk?

There are **eight defect categories** used to assess tree risk. Remember, use caution around risky trees because they can be dangerous. When assessing risk, **do not try to remove a tree or parts of a tree on your own**. Contact an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborist and/or Mississippi certified tree surgeon to safely tend to or remove your tree.

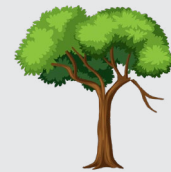
Dead tree

Look for peeling bark, no green under the bark on twigs, mushrooms on the stem or branches, and leaf/needle loss.



Dead tree top or branches

Look for hanging branches, brittle twigs, mushrooms on branches, and leaf/needle loss on branches or the top of the tree.



Weak branch unions

Look for weak, V-shaped branch unions and areas where two or more branches arise at the same spot.



Cracks

Look for horizontal and vertical cracks in the stem and branches that can cause the tree to split.



Poor tree architecture

Look for tree leaning, most foliage growing on one side of the tree, significant trunk taper, and multiple stems arising from the same base.



Root damage or decay

Look for mechanical damage to roots, mushrooms that indicate root rot or decay, and soil drainage problems.



Cankers

Look for localized areas of dead bark and wood, bark discoloration, sunken bark, and sap oozing from the bark.



Decayed wood

Look for hollows and soft wood where decay has occurred on the stem, and for soft wood and mushrooms on twigs and branches.



What do I do if my tree seems risky?

As problems accumulate, so does the risk associated with the tree. For tree questions, please contact a local ISA certified arborist and/or tree surgeon in your area who has expert knowledge about tree care. Scan the QR code to [find a certified arborist or verify the credentials of someone claiming to be a certified arborist](#).



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