



# Tree Preservation and Protection Guidelines

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## Links to other resources:

- City of La Cañada Flintridge ([www.lc.ca.gov](http://www.lc.ca.gov))
- La Cañada Flintridge’s Lanternman House ([www.lantermanfoundation.org](http://www.lantermanfoundation.org))
- Descanso Gardens ([www.descansogardens.org](http://www.descansogardens.org))
- The Arbor Day Foundation ([www.arbordrday.org](http://www.arbordrday.org))
- California Oak Foundation ([www.californiaoaks.org](http://www.californiaoaks.org))
- Trees are Good ([www.treesaregood.org](http://www.treesaregood.org))

## Introduction to Guidelines

The iconic trees of La Cañada Flintridge stand as an integral part of the city's shaded streets and semi-rural setting. They create a verdant oasis in a region of Southern California where the sunlight can sometimes be blinding.

*The wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more. - Ralph Waldo Emerson*

In addition to being beautiful additions to our neighborhoods, trees increase property values, generate clean air, shade homes, intercept and store storm water, abate noise, and hold hillsides in place with their extensive root systems. They inspire poetry and hold up worlds of make believe. For all these reasons, the city is committed to protecting its trees and preserving them for generations to come.

**In 2013, La Cañada Flintridge simplified its tree preservation and protection ordinance so that residents can more easily identify and manage the Protected Trees on their property.**

This Preservation and Protection Guide is designed to act as a reference for property owners with questions about their trees. It outlines best practices for tree care and maintenance so that residents can be a part of preserving La Cañada Flintridge's heritage for generations to come.

## History of Trees in La Cañada Flintridge

Many stories can be told about the trees of La Cañada Flintridge, from the eucalyptus that were imported to act as wind breakers, to the olive groves planted by Italian immigrants, to the palms that once lined the driveway of the Dunham mansion that burned down in the 1930s. When faced with the challenge of which trees should receive legal protection, the City Council decided to focus on the native oaks and sycamores of the region, as well as a small grouping of deodar cedars.

California's native oak trees have long provided shade and beauty to the residents of La Cañada Flintridge. Once established, they are hearty, sustainable trees requiring little help to thrive. La Cañada Flintridge is fortunate to have several species of oaks growing within its boundaries including Coast Live Oak, Interior Live Oak, Canyon Live Oak, Scrub Oak, Coastal Scrub Oak, Valley Oak, and Mesa Oak.

*There were so many things a tree could do: add color, provide shade, drop fruit, or become a children's playground, a whole sky universe to climb and hang from; an architecture of food and pleasure, that was a tree. - Ray Bradbury*

The California Sycamore is also native to the region. Taking root near riverbeds, streams, and

natural springs, they grow to heights of 90 feet. These graceful trees have the largest leaves of any native tree in North America, which explains their reputation for being excellent shade providers.

The Deodar Cedar, which is native to the Himalayan Mountains, was first brought to La Cañada Flintridge in 1913 by Edwin T. Earl who planted these trees on 500 acres of land he purchased in 1910. He was also said to have named the region, adding the "y" to Alta Canyada as a nod to the pronunciation of the Spanish name. A century later, a stroll through the neighborhood of upper Alta Canyada rolls out an amazing show of towering trees. They dwarf even the most luxurious homes, and have become an iconic symbol of the area.

### **A Unique Growing Region**

Now just 15 minutes from the urban center of downtown Los Angeles, La Cañada Flintridge was, for a long time, known simply as “the glen between the hills.” The city’s sloping terrain and ample sunshine create a naturally protected area for plants to thrive. The climate in La Cañada Flintridge is relatively frost-free with moderate temperatures, making the area ideally suited to growing plants from many different Mediterranean and temperate regions. The City boasts several parks, including the renowned Descanso Gardens, and borders the Angeles National Forest with its expansive woodlands and chaparral.

### **Tree City USA**

The Arbor Day Foundation, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters, has established guidelines for recognizing cities that prioritize the well being of their trees. To be considered a Tree City USA, a community must have a board or department committed to trees, as well as a tree care ordinance. They must allocate \$2 per capita to an annual tree budget and observe Arbor Day annually. As a Tree City USA, La Cañada Flintridge is recognized as a community that cares about well-managed urban forests and the communities that benefit from them.





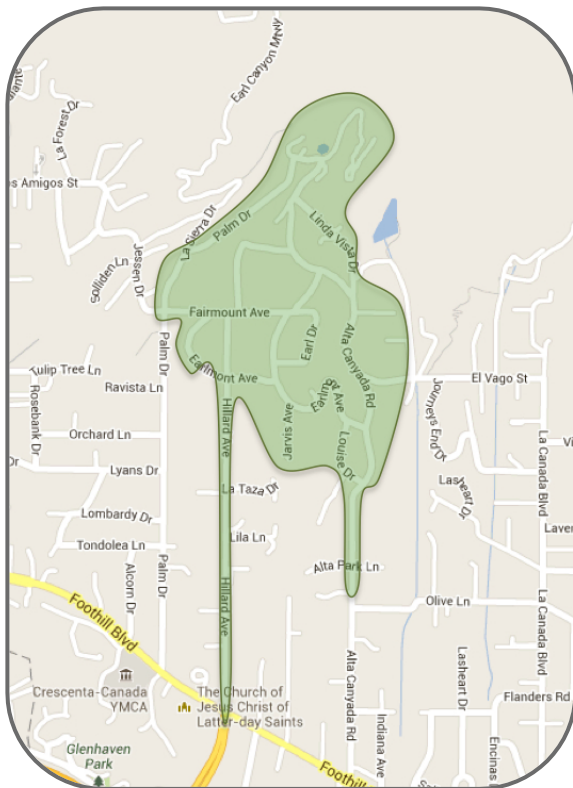
## The Historic Deodar District and the History Behind It



Even though the Deodar Cedars are not native, they have stood as symbols of La Cañada Flintridge's beautiful community since Edwin T. Earl planted his 500 acres with them in 1913. The Historic Deodar District was thus created to provide a safe haven for the trees. Pursuant to the revised city ordinance, deodar cedars remain protected in this district as outlined below.

### Historic Deodar District

Protected Trees will only include deodar cedars that are within 20 feet of a curb or edge of pavement on the following streets:



- Alta Canyada Road (North of Alta Park Lane)
- Bonita Vista Drive,
- Bubbling Well Lane,
- Del Oro Drive,
- Earl Drive,
- Earlmont Avenue,
- El Vago Street (West of Indian Drive)
- Fairmount Avenue,
- Hacienda Drive,
- Hillard Avenue,
- Jarvis Avenue,
- Linda Vista Drive,
- Louise Drive, and
- Palm Drive (North of Fairmount Avenue).

## How to Determine if the Trees on Your Property are Protected

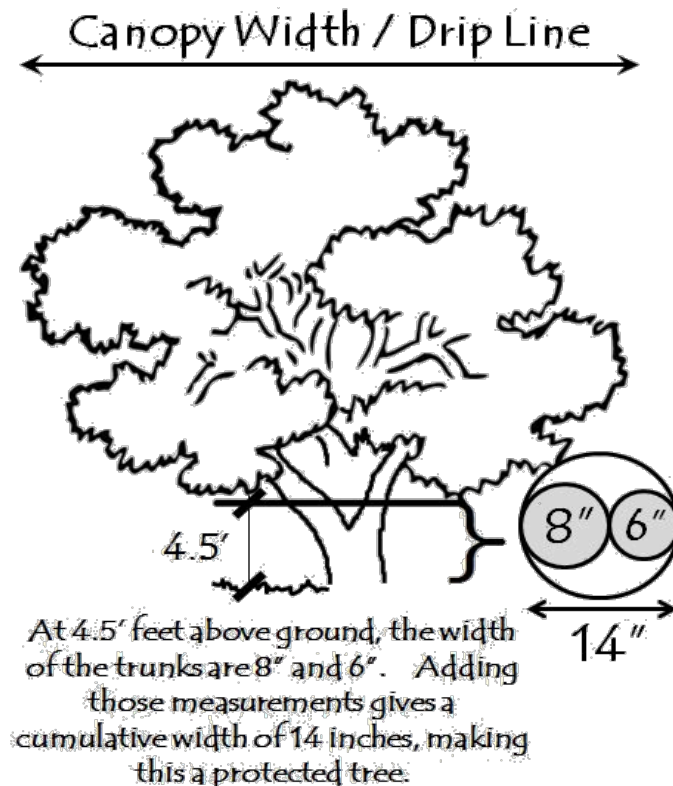
In 2013, the City Council created a simplified definition of Protected Trees. Under the new ordinance, Protected Trees include:

- Oak or sycamore trees (see descriptions on pages 8) with a diameter of 12 inches or greater (see below for measuring instructions) growing in the R-1 Single Family Residential Zones of the city (zoning maps can be found at: <http://bit.ly/LCFzones>)
- Deodar cedars (see description on page 13) within the Historic Deodar District (as outlined on page 5)
- Any tree over five feet in height in a non-R-1 Single Family Residential Zone
- All trees on public property (please see page 7 for further details)

### Measuring a Tree

To be considered protected, oaks, sycamores, and deodars in the Historic Deodar District must have a diameter at breast height (DBH) of at least 12 inches. "Breast height" is considered to be 4.5 feet (1.4 meters) above ground level.

For multi-stem trees, the diameter of each stem is measured and added together to determine the total diameter of the tree.



## Trees on Public Property

Property used by the public for travel, as well as the land that acts as a buffer between private and public land, is often referred to as the city's Right-of-Way. The specifics of the Right-Of-Way designation can vary from street to street. Individuals interested in learning more are encouraged to reference Section 4.24 of the LCF Municipal Code.

**All trees growing on this public (Right-of-Way) property are protected and maintained by the city.** As such, they must be identified on project plans and protected from root or canopy damage. The care of city-owned trees is further outlined in Section 4.24 of the LCF Municipal Code.

*Trees are poems that the  
earth writes upon the sky.  
— Kahlil Gibran*

It can sometimes be difficult to tell if a tree is on your property or on designated Right-of-Way property. **If you are at all uncertain about whether a tree is growing on private or public land, please contact the Public Works Department at 818-790-8882.** Before undertaking any development project (such as a new driveway apron) that could potentially impact these trees and lead to unexpected costs for the homeowner, please contact the Public Works Department for specifications and protection requirements.

## Tree Emergencies

**A tree emergency is a situation in which a Protected Tree poses an immediate threat or hazard to health, safety or property as a result of an accident or an act of nature.**

If an emergency requiring the removal of a tree occurs during regular City Hall business hours, the Director of Community Development must be notified (at 818-790-8881) before going ahead with the removal. If City Hall is not open, and the situation is truly an emergency, the person removing the tree will be allowed to notify the Director after the fact. If you find yourself in this situation, keep in mind that photos documenting the emergency will be useful in explaining the need to proceed with removal in the absence of prior approval.

***Please note that signs of disease are not an emergency. Should you notice signs of disease or insect infestation, please contact a certified arborist.***

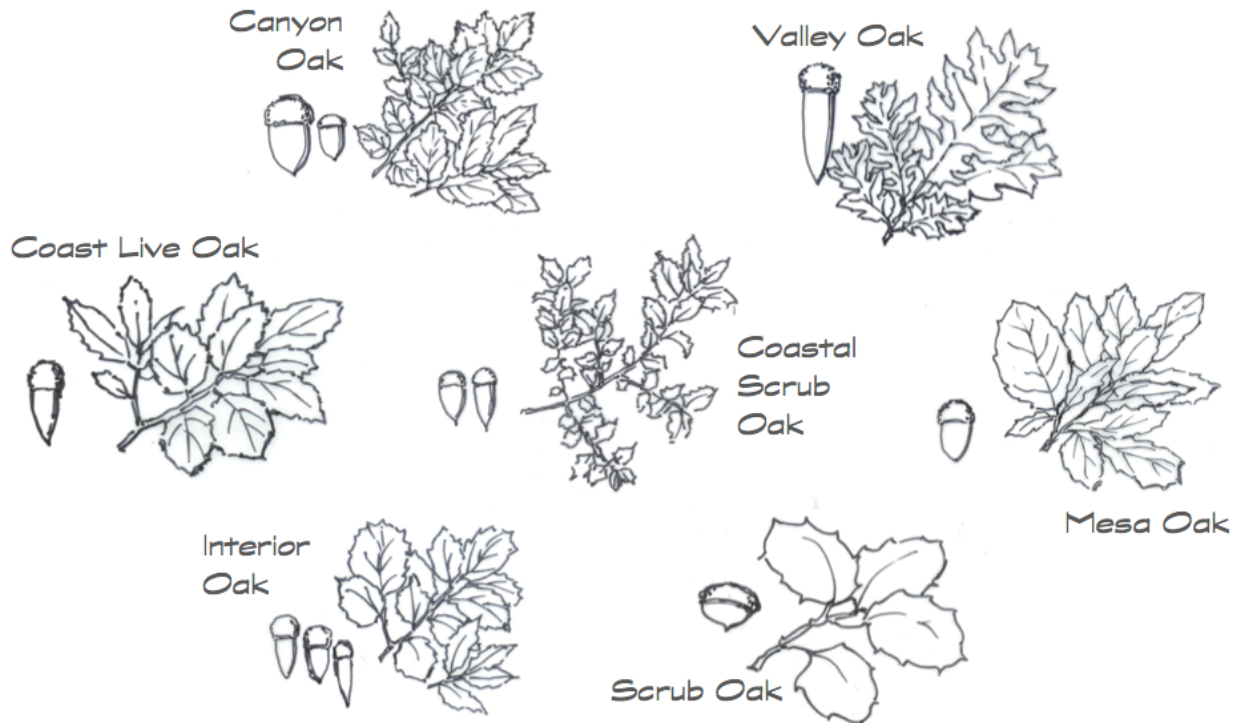
## Protected Trees – Identification and Care

### Oak

There are several species of oaks in La Cañada Flintridge. The single most distinct characteristic of the oaks are their acorns. Just like the different species of trees, acorns come in different shapes and sizes, but no other tree produces this style of nut, with a smooth bottom and bumpy cap. It is the simplest way to identify an oak tree.



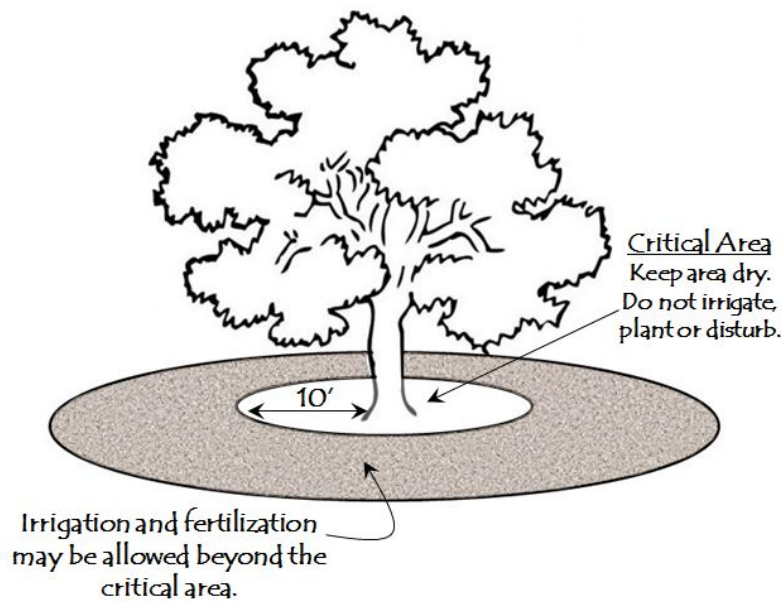
**The seven species of oak protected by La Cañada Flintridge’s updated city ordinance are Coast Live Oak, Interior Live Oak, Canyon Live Oak, Scrub Oak, Coastal Scrub Oak, Valley Oak, Mesa Oak.**





## Watering Oaks

Mature oaks have extensive root zones that allow them to survive the long, dry summers of Southern California. The root zone of a mature oak tree may extend up to three times the reach of the drip line, allowing the tree to better access water during periods of drought. **As a result oaks do not generally require irrigation. In fact, excessive irrigation can be harmful. Sprinklers should not be used. Instead, use a drip system or soaker hose placed on the ground underneath the outer two-thirds of the tree's canopy.**



When additional water is given, the area within 10 feet of the trunk should be kept dry.

For best results, keep the entire root zone (the area under the canopy plus another 10 to 15 feet) of your oak covered in mulch. The best mulch for an oak is its own leaf drop. Where possible, allow the leaf litter to collect underneath the tree.

It's best not to plant flowers or grass too close to oaks. The extra water required to maintain lawns and flowers is harmful to these trees. Similarly, heavy gravel and rocks trap moisture while compacting the earth – a combination that can be detrimental to root systems. **Keep the area underneath your oak trees clear, and make sure that sprinklers don't spray within ten feet of the base of the tree.**

## Pruning Oaks

In most cases, mature trees are pruned only to remove dying, diseased or broken limbs in order to prevent damage to structures or vehicles. To minimize the risk of pest problems, pruning is best accomplished between July and October.

The pruning process must be undertaken with great care, as any cut has the potential to change the growth of a tree and create entry points for insects or disease. For more information on pruning, please refer to page 17 of this document.

**NOTE: Indiscriminately pruning or cutting a tree to reduce its size (often called “topping,” “heading,” “tipping,” “hat-racking,” or “rounding over”) is one of the most harmful types of tree pruning. La Cañada Flintridge does not allow topping of Protected Trees.**

**Furthermore, topping of trees in general is harmful to all trees (protected or not) and should be avoided. For more information, please refer to page 18 of this document.**

*I had always planned to make a large painting of the early spring, when the first leaves are at the bottom of the trees, and they seem to float in space in a wonderful way. But the arrival of spring can't be done in one picture.*  
- David Hockney

## Fertilizing Oaks

In general, oaks do not need fertilizer unless a soil test reveals low nutrient levels. Stressed or weakened trees should not be fertilized. If needed, fertilizer should be applied outside a 10-foot diameter around the trunk, in late winter or early spring. After applying fertilizer, the area should be thoroughly watered (see diagram on page 9). Over application of fertilizer will result in root burn and could damage the tree. Only fertilize if directed by a professional arborist.

## Herbicides and Pesticides

Do not use weed killers or insect sprays within the root zone of Protected Trees without the advice of an expert. Such sprays can kill beneficial microorganisms and “good” insects that help the tree remain strong. You may need to consult with a certified arborist or other specialist to deal with insects and pests.

## California Sycamore

The leaves of the California Sycamore are palmate, meaning that they look a bit like a hand, with five points. The bark is relatively smooth, and generally has a mottled patchwork of colors including white, beige, grey and pale brown. Dangling seed balls (or achenes) range in color from green to light brown and appear woolly. Sycamore trees can grow to 90 feet in height with majestic, open crowns.



### Watering Sycamores

**Unlike oaks, sycamores evolved to grow in streambeds and can tolerate significantly more water in close proximity to their trunks.** They can fall victim to pests when not irrigated regularly. In hot weather, keep an eye out for dry soil and water as needed to keep the soil moist. Mulching the ground around your sycamore will reduce water needs by 20-30%.

**Turf grass is a poor choice under sycamores, as the roots of turf grass often compete with those of the trees, causing drought stress on a tree in the middle of a well-irrigated lawn.** Furthermore, the tree's roots grow in a wide radius and can often break through lawn cover, exposing themselves to the blades of mowers.

### Pruning Sycamores

In most cases, mature trees are pruned only to remove dying, diseased or broken limbs in order to prevent damage to structures or vehicles. Pruning is best accomplished in the winter, but it is important to prune when the tree is dry, as wet weather can facilitate the spread of disease.

*Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.*

*- Franklin D. Roosevelt*

The pruning process must be undertaken with great care, as any cut has the potential to change the growth of a tree. For more information on pruning, please refer to page 17 of this document.

**NOTE: Indiscriminately pruning or cutting a tree to reduce its size (often called "topping," "heading," "tipping," "hat-racking," or "rounding over") is one of the most**

harmful types of tree pruning. La Cañada Flintridge does not allow topping of Protected Trees. Furthermore, topping of trees in general is harmful to all trees (protected or not) and should be avoided. For more information, please refer to page 18 of this document.

### Fertilizing Sycamores

Over application of fertilizer will result in root burn and could damage the tree. Therefore, fertilizer should only be used in cases of nutrient deficiency. Only fertilize sycamores if directed to do so by a professional arborist.

### Herbicides and Pesticides

Do not use weed killers or insect sprays around the base of Protected Trees without the advice of an expert. Such sprays can kill beneficial microorganisms and “good” insects that help the tree remain strong.

You may need to consult with a certified arborist or other specialist to deal with insects and pests.

*God has cared for these trees,  
saved them from drought,  
disease, avalanches, and a  
thousand tempests and  
floods. But he cannot save  
them from fools.*

*- John Muir*



## Deodar Cedar

Despite its storied legacy in La Cañada Flintridge the deodar cedar originated in the Himalayan Mountains. It has greyish-green, needle-like leaves and barrel-shaped cones. When fully mature they can reach heights of up to 80 feet, with its crown developing into a wide, roughly pyramid-like shape.



### Watering Deodar Cedars

**Deodar cedars are hearty trees, adapted to environments with little water. It is important to let the soil around them dry before watering. Poor soil drainage or overwatering will cause root rot, needle drop, fungal infection and death.**

It's best not to plant flowers or turf grass too close to deodar cedars. The extra water required to maintain lawns and flowers is harmful to these trees.

### Pruning Deodar Cedars

In most cases, mature trees are pruned only to remove dying, diseased or broken limbs in order to prevent damage to structures or vehicles. To minimize the risk of pest problems, pruning is best accomplished between November and January.

The process must be undertaken with great care, as any cut has the potential to change the growth of a tree. For more information on pruning, please refer to page 17 of this document.

**NOTE: Indiscriminately pruning or cutting a tree to reduce its size (often called "topping," "heading," "tipping," "hat-racking," or "rounding over") is one of the most harmful types of tree pruning. La Cañada Flintridge does not allow topping of Protected Trees. Furthermore, topping of trees in general is harmful to all trees (protected or not) and should be avoided. For more information, please refer to page 18 of this document.**

## Fertilizers

In general, deodar cedars do not need fertilizer unless a soil test reveals low nutrient levels. Stressed or weakened trees should not be fertilized. If needed, fertilizer should be applied outside a 10-foot diameter around the trunk, in late winter or early spring. After applying fertilizer, the area should be thoroughly watered. Over application of fertilizer will result in root burn and damage to the tree.

## Herbicides and Pesticides

Do not use weed killers or insect sprays around the base of Protected Trees without the advice of an expert. Such sprays can kill beneficial microorganisms and “good” insects that help the tree remain strong. You may need to consult with a certified arborist or other specialist to deal with insects and pests.

## Permits and Certified Arborists

**Removal of a Protected Tree, requires a permit from the City of La Cañada Flintridge. The City maintains a list titled “City Approved Arborists and Tree Trimmers.” Any work performed on a Protected Tree must be undertaken by a professional on this list.**

### Key Permitting Information

Removal of a Protected Tree requires a permit issued by the City. Permits may be issued for any of the following reasons:

- The Protected Tree is interfering with a structure on the property and no reasonable alternative to removal is available.
- The Protected Tree is causing unreasonable impairment of the property owner’s use of the property.
- The Protected Tree is diseased or damaged.
- The fire department requires the tree’s removal for safety reasons.
- Other reasonable causes, assuming that the removal of the Protected Tree will not impact the character of the neighborhood.

Trees that are unprotected, deemed a hazard, or constitute an emergency (see page 7) do not require a permit to be removed. Contact the City Planning Department at (818) 790-8881 for more information.

**Removal of a dead Protected Tree requires notification of the Planning Department and evidence that the tree is dead. In the case of dead tree, no removal permit is required.**

## Protected Tree Removal Permit Process

To obtain a permit for the removal of a Protected Tree, the property owner simply needs to submit an application for review by the Director of Community Development. The Director will determine if any further information is needed (such as an arborist report). If a permit is issued, the Property Owner may be required to plant replacement trees to maintain the beauty of the neighborhood.

## Key Contacts

For information regarding trees growing on private property, contact the Planning Department at 818-790-8881. For information regarding trees growing in the Public Right of Way (see page 7 for a description), contact the Public Works Department at 818-790-8882.

## Certified Care Contractors and Arborists

**A list of city-approved care contractors and arborists is available on the city website ([www.lcf.ca.gov](http://www.lcf.ca.gov)).** If a care contractor or arborist is not on the certification list, they can apply to be added. Certified arborists or commercial tree service providers can be added if they possess an Arborist Certification, or a contractor's license with the D49 (Tree Service Contractor). Trees located on property zoned as R-1 for single-family homes may also be trimmed by the property owner. **Recommended best practices for the proper care and maintenance of Protected Trees is given beginning on page 8.**

## Tree Replacement Fund

If it is determined that a replacement tree is not required to maintain the character of the neighborhood, property owners may, under certain conditions, opt to contribute to the city's Tree Replacement Fund instead of planting a new tree on their own property. The amount shall be based on the City's Tree Replacement Chart and all funds are used to plant trees along public streets and in parks.

*Tree planting is always a utopian enterprise, it seems to me, a wager on a future the planter doesn't necessarily expect to witness.*  
- Michael Pollan

## Replacement Trees and Restitution

**The City has adopted a resolution to establish the number and size of trees to be planted as replacement trees and/or amounts to be deposited into the tree replacement fund for tree removal requests. As part of the resolution, the City has also established amounts for restitution when a Protected Tree is illegally removed.**

Contact the City's Planning Department at (818) 790-8881 for more information on replacement trees and/or restitution costs.

## Insects and Disease

While most insects and pathogens primarily cause aesthetic damage and do not require treatment, any sign of distress in your trees should be taken seriously. Symptoms to watch for are:

- Openings or splits in the trunk, especially if leaking sap.
- Small, deep holes that could be the result of burrowing insects.
- Shelf-like fungus growing at the base of a tree or capped mushrooms growing within a six-foot radius of the trunk.
- Leaf discoloration or the unseasonal dropping of leaves.

If you notice any of these warning signs, contact your certified arborist or other tree care professional as soon as possible. Stopping disease and insects quickly helps to prevent their spread to nearby trees.



*Photos by Rebecca Latta*



## Additional Information On Caring For Trees

### Pruning Best Practices

All trees get their energy from the sun's rays, using their leaves as tiny solar panels. Removal of leaves forces the tree to pull reserves of energy from the roots, trunk and branches, which weakens the tree and makes it more susceptible to decay, insects and disease.

Healthy trees generally require little pruning. When they do, there are five acceptable types:

1. Cleaning removes the dead, dying or diseased branches.
2. Thinning selectively removes live branches to increase light penetration and airflow through the tree.
3. Raising removes lower branches (as is often important for trees that hang over streets).
4. Reduction is usually performed to create clearance for utility lines, and is different than topping, which can cause serious damage to a tree.
5. Restructuring is specialized pruning aimed at correcting a structural issue.

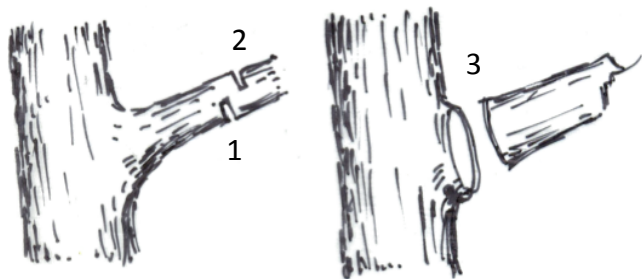
It is highly recommended that before pruning any trees, and specifically Protected Trees, you should consult a professional on the list of City Approved Arborists and Tree Trimmers.



When pruning any tree, cuts should be made just outside the branch collar.



On a dead branch that has a collar of live wood, the final cut should be made just beyond the outer edge of the collar.



Use the three-cut method to remove a large limb to avoid tearing bark and creating an unnecessarily large wound site. The goal of the three-cut method is to minimize the size of the wound that the tree will have to heal over.

In the years following a pruning cut, the tree will gradually roll a protective layer of live wood over the wound site, preventing the entry of decay organisms. If this layer does not form, then the wound site may eventually turn into a decay site that will spread into the heartwood of the rest of the tree. The smaller the wound site, the shorter the period of time that the heartwood is exposed.

**Climbing spurs should not be used on live trees.**

### Topping and Hat Racking

Topping is the practice of indiscriminately cutting a tree to reduce its size. Also known as



New shoots develop profusely below a topping cut.

“hat-racking,” “heading back,” “stubbing,” “pollarding,” “center stripping,” or “rounding over,” **topping is one of the most harmful types of tree pruning and is detrimental to the health of all trees.**

Homeowners often cite concern over the size of a tree as the reason for topping, however, trimming so many leaves (usually 50-100% of the total) actually encourages the tree to grow multiple shoots and a new crop of leaves as quickly as possible. If the tree does not have enough stored energy to grow new leaves, it will be seriously weakened.

**Professional arborists and care contractors trim trees selectively, to reduce height or spread carefully, preserving the natural aesthetics of the tree and avoiding long-term damage.**

### Tree Root Protection

The reduction of a tree’s root system limits the tree’s ability to absorb water and nutrients, often resulting in symptoms of drought stress. It also reduces a tree’s anchorage and increases the likelihood of it falling. **Root injury is easy to prevent, but nearly impossible to treat.**

Roots can be damaged by:

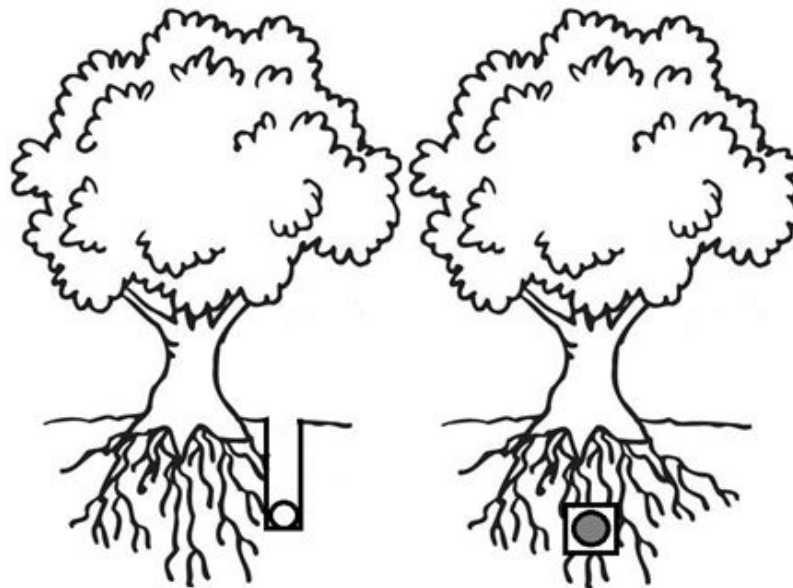
- The compaction of the earth by heavy equipment
- A change of grade near the tree

- Digging to install footings, irrigation or electrical piping near the tree

Every damaged root becomes a potential entry point for decay organisms, and over time, larger sections of the root system can become affected. Other consequences of root damage are bark loss, canopy loss, and tree death. Often these symptoms won't manifest themselves until 2-5 years after the root injury.

**In La Cañada Flintridge, Protected Tree root cutting that causes tree decline and/or death is a violation of zoning code 11.40, titled The Preservation and Protection of Designated Trees on Private Property.**

**When digging on your property to install irrigation pipes, electrical wiring, or for any other reason, consider the benefits of tunneling under tree roots, rather than digging a trench that would cut off a much larger portion of the trees underground root system.** All root cutting should be done under the supervisions of an arborist. Tree care professionals may be able to propose alternative building methods that will prevent unnecessary damage to a tree's root system.



Less damage is done to tree roots  
If utilities are tunneled under a tree (right)  
rather than across the roots (left).

## Lighting, Swings and Tree Forts

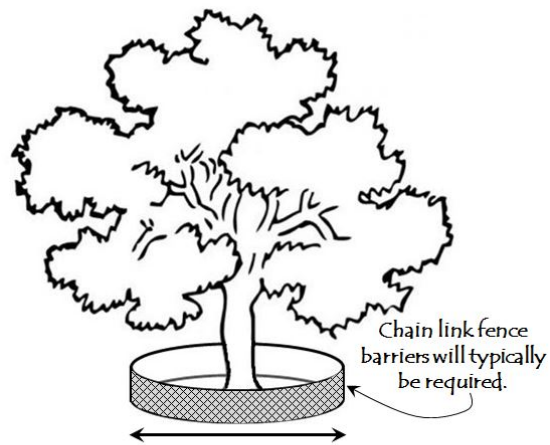
In addition to adding beauty to the landscape, trees also provide a framework for outdoor lighting, swings and tree forts. However, **bolts that pierce the bark and cables that wrap around limbs can cause serious damage and increase the tree's susceptibility to insects or infection.** Instead of using the branches as your armature, build your tree house on stilts around the tree, making sure that the footings for the stilts are beyond the tree's protection zone, and leaving plenty of room for future growth. Consider hanging swings and lights from man-made frameworks and keep in mind that plans for structures may need to be reviewed by Planning, Building & Safety prior to construction. Minimizing damage to your trees will help ensure that they are there for years to come.

## Preservation of Protected Trees During Development Activity

**Injuries to a tree or group of trees can be minimized during construction by providing a protection zone - a fenced area around a tree that will not be disturbed.**

Any project that involves digging into the ground (such as installing cement foundations or excavation for a pool) must respect a radius around Protected Trees that is equal to 3.5 times the trunk diameter of the tree. (See page 6 for instructions as to how to measure the trunk diameter of your tree.)

For flatwork (such as paving) the protection zone must include an area with a radius of 2.5 times the tree's trunk diameter.



Any project involving digging into the ground must provide a Tree Protection Zone equal to 3.5x the trunk diameter of the tree.

No construction should take place within the protection zone, and workers should be informed that this area is not to be used for the cleaning or storing of equipment.

**When conducting any development activity (as defined in section 11.40.070 of La Cañada Flintridge's municipal code) within thirty feet of a Protected Tree, contact the City's Planning Department at (818) 790-8881 for a full list of preservation requirements.** If the work is to be done in close proximity to a tree or trees growing on public land, please contact The Public Works Department at 818-790-8882.



## Acknowledgements

Don Voss, Council Member, City of La Cañada Flintridge

Robert J. Stanley, Director of Community Development, City of La Cañada Flintridge

Harriet Harris, Assistant Planner, City of La Cañada Flintridge

Chris Gjolme, Planner, City of La Cañada Flintridge

Rebecca Latta, Consulting Arborist, Horticulturalist

ISA Certified Arborist WE 4264A  
ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualified  
Member, American Society of Consulting Arborists  
Member, California Native Plant Society

James Komen, Class One Arboriculture

Certified Arborist WE 9909A