Tree Care & Maintenance

When to Prune Trees

Deciduous Trees

Deciduous trees (ones that lose their leaves in winter) are usually pruned in autumn and winter. In some cases, for example with magnolias and walnuts, pruning is best done in late summer, as healing is quicker.
Trees such as (Prunus sp) Common Name: Wild Cherries, Black Cherry, Bitter Cherry, Choke Cherry, Pin Cherry, which are prone to silver leaf disease are best pruned from April to July when the disease spores are not on the wind, and the tree sap is rising rather than falling (which pushes out infection rather than drawing it in).
Some trees can bleed sap if pruned in late winter and early spring. Although seldom fatal, this is unsightly and can weaken the tree. Birches and walnuts often bleed if pruned at the wrong time.

Evergreen trees

Evergreens seldom need pruning, although dead and diseased branches can be removed in late summer.

Tree Maintenance

Trees are an important part of any landscape, whether they are in a public park, street or in our gardens. They improve the look of our surroundings and can help to increase our property values, purify our air and provide a habitat for wildlife.

Providing a preventative maintenance programme for your trees is a wise investment. Preventing smaller problems through regular maintenance is much more cost effective and less time consuming than curing bigger problems once it has happened.

An effective maintenance programme, including regular inspections and the necessary follow-up care of mulching, fertilising and pruning, can detect problems and deal with them before they become damaging or fatal.

Tree Inspection

Tree inspection is an effective evaluation tool to highlight any change in a tree's health and condition before the situation becomes too serious. It can identify the presence of an insect infestation, bacterial or fungal infection, structural problems or the effects of environmental change.

During an inspection it is important to ensure the whole tree, from top to bottom is inspected thoroughly. As a starting point it is important to examine the signs of tree vigour: new leaves or buds, leaf size, twig growth, and absence of crown dieback.

A reduction in the extension of new shoots, such as leaves and buds, is a clue that a tree's health has changed. Comparison of growth over the past three years will help to identify whether there has been a change in the tree's typical growth pattern.
Further signs of poor tree health are trunk decay and/ or crown dieback. These symptoms indicate that problems began several years before. Loose bark or deformed growths, such as bracket fungi, indicate stem decay.

No one expects a tree owner to be a tree expert or be able to diagnose major problems; however, being in a position to see the tree all year round, is an advantage to identifying any changes which are out of the ordinary. Any abnormalities found whilst inspecting the tree, whether it is dead branches, discoloured or dead leaves, insect infestation or structural changes, and you are unsure what to do, consult 3 Counties Tree Surgery for advice.

Mulching

Mulching can reduce environmental stress by providing trees with a stable root environment that is cooler and contains more moisture than the surrounding soil.
Mulching can also help prevent mechanical damage by keeping lawnmowers and strimmers away from the base of the tree.

To be effective, mulch should be applied 7-10cm deep and cover the entire root area, which could be as much as two to three times the crown spread. If the area cannot be mulched to this degree, then it is recommended that mulch is applied to as much of the area within the trees drip line as possible. When placing mulch, care should be taken to keep a gap of approximately 5cm around the base of the tree. This will help to avoid moist bark conditions and prevent stem decay.

A layer of 5-10cm thick loosely packed, shredded leaves, pine straw or bark chip is adequate. Care should be taken not to place plastic under the mulch as it interferes with gas exchange.

Fertilisation

Fertilisation is another important aspect of mature tree care. Trees require certain nutrients to function and grow. Urban trees often grow in soil that does not contain sufficient available nutrients for satisfactory growth and development. In these situations it may be necessary to fertilise to improve plant vigour.

Fertilising a tree can increase growth, reduce susceptibility to certain disease and pests, and can even reverse declining health. However, if fertiliser is not applied correctly it can adversely affect the tree. Mature trees making satisfactory growth may not require any additional fertiliser. Before considering using fertiliser it is good practice to know what nutrients are needed and how it should be applied.

Soil conditions can vary from area to area, so it is important to take the time to have the soil tested before selecting a fertiliser. Once the results of the soil test have arrived, it would be prudent to discuss with 3 Counties Tree Surgery the best course of action.

Mature trees have expansive root systems which can extend two to three times the size of the canopy. A major portion of the actively growing tree roots exist outside the tree's drip line. It is important to know this before applying fertiliser to the tree or turf. Many lawn fertilisers contain a weed and feed mix that can be harmful to a tree.
When applying a broadleaf herbicide to a lawn, it is important to remember that tree roots co-exist with turf roots. The same herbicide which kills broadleaf weeds can be taken up by the tree roots and can harm or kill a broad leaf tree if applied incorrectly.
Understanding the extent of a tree's root system, before fertilising, is necessary to determine how much, what type, and where best to apply fertiliser.

Pruning

Tree pruning is the most common tree maintenance procedure after watering. Pruning is often desirable or necessary to remove dead, diseased or dangerous branches, improving tree structure and form, or maintain safety. Since each cut has the potential to change the shape or health of a tree, it is important that no branch is removed without a reason.

Removing foliage from a tree has two distinct effects: it reduces photosynthesis and may reduce overall growth. Pruning should always be performed sparingly. Over pruning is harmful because without enough leaves, a tree cannot absorb enough sunlight to produce the energy to survive, grow. If the branches from the centre of the crown are removed, this can result in lion-tailing; a situation where the remaining branches are at the ends of the limbs rather than being distributed along their length. This can lead to failure of branches in high winds.

Pruning mature trees is something which should be carried out by 3 Counties Tree Surgery who are trained, competent tree care professional arborists able to identify the type of pruning required and the correct and safest way to carry it out.

Removal

Although tree removal is a last resort, there are situations when it is necessary. 3 Counties Tree Surgery can help decide whether a tree should be removed or not.

Removal is recommended when a tree:

- Is dead, dying or considered irreparably hazardous
- Is causing an obstruction, or is causing harm to other trees, and the situation is impossible to correct through pruning.
- Should be removed to allow for construction.

Prior to removing any tree greater than 7.5cm girth, you should contact the local authority and ask to speak to your local tree officer, to see whether your tree is covered by a Tree Preservation Order, a conservation area or is part of planning consent. If it is, then you will need to submit an application to the council for permission to remove the tree. 3 Counties Tree Surgery are happy to create and submit an application on your behalf.

For further information on tree care you can 3 Counties Tree and ask to speak to your local tree surgeon.