



**Hillsborough  
County Florida**  
Development Services



# Residential Tree Removal Guide



# Do I need a permit to remove my tree?

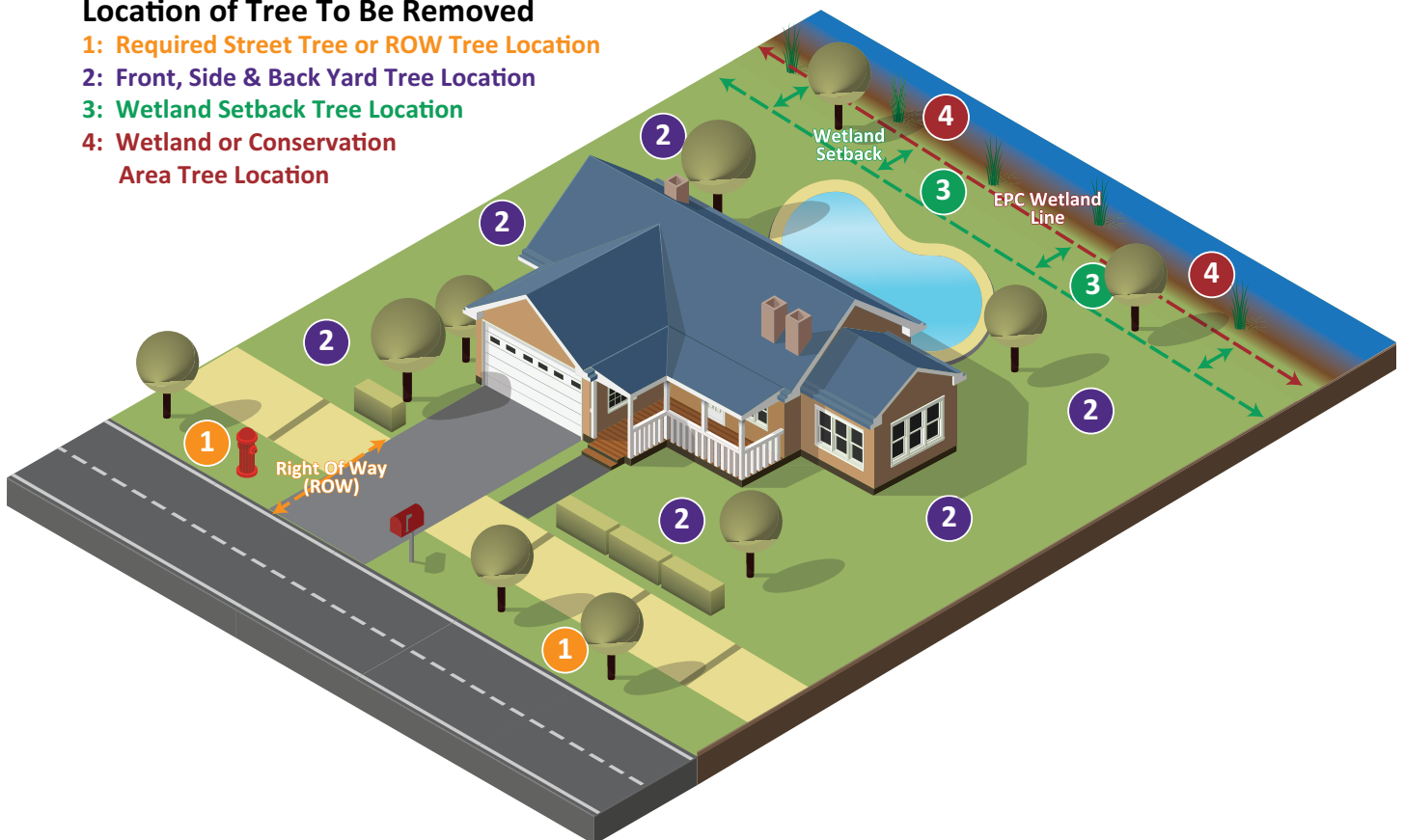
It may seem as though there are as many rules for removing trees as there are different species of trees. We're here to help! This document will provide you with general guidelines to help determine whether a permit is needed for your tree removal project. Use this guide to determine if a permit is required prior to removing your tree.

## STEP 1: Determine the tree's location for the purpose of a tree removal permit

For the purpose of permitting requirements, use the graphic below to determine the location of the tree you wish to remove. You will use this location in conjunction with the size of the tree to determine if a permit is required.

### Location of Tree To Be Removed

- 1: Required Street Tree or ROW Tree Location
- 2: Front, Side & Back Yard Tree Location
- 3: Wetland Setback Tree Location
- 4: Wetland or Conservation Area Tree Location



## STEP 2: Measure the tree's diameter

Find the tree's Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) and use the chart on the following page to determine if the tree requires a permit for removal due to its size and location. To determine the DBH of your tree, measure all the way around the tree (as if you were measuring your waist) approximately 4.5 feet from the ground and divide by 3.14. For example: a 40" circumference tree is going to have a DBH of just under 13 inches.



# Do I need a permit to remove my tree?

Using the size and location of your tree, check the chart below to determine if a permit is required prior to removal. If you still require assistance or clarification, please reach out to our Natural Resources staff at (813) 272-5600.

		Tree location			
		① Street/ROW tree	② Yard, Lot, Property <sup>2</sup>	③ Wetland Setback	④ Conservation Area
Type of Residence	Single Family (not in a subdivision)	5" DBH and Larger	12" DBH and Larger	12" DBH and Larger	Contact EPC
	Single Family (in a subdivision/PD)	Any Size <sup>1</sup>	12" DBH and Larger	12" DBH and Larger	Contact EPC
	Mobile Home (own the land)	5" DBH and Larger	12" DBH and Larger	12" DBH and Larger	Contact EPC
	Mobile Home (rent the lot, in a park)	Any Size <sup>1</sup>	5" DBH and Larger	Any Size	Contact EPC
	Condominium (common areas)	Any Size <sup>1</sup>	5" DBH and Larger	Any Size	Contact EPC
	Townhomes (on your land)	Any Size <sup>1</sup>	12" DBH and Larger	12" DBH and Larger	Contact EPC
	Townhomes (common areas)	Any Size <sup>1</sup>	5" DBH and Larger	Any Size	Contact EPC
	Duplex, garden home or patio homes	Any Size <sup>1</sup>	12" DBH and Larger	12" DBH and Larger	Contact EPC
	Vacant Residential Lot (not in a subdivision)	(ROW) 12" DBH or Larger	5" DBH and Larger	5" DBH and Larger	Contact EPC

Notes:

1. Required street trees must be replaced with a tree from the [approved street tree list](#). If you are planting palms to replace other trees, you must plant 2 palms for every tree removed.
2. When trees are located within 100 feet of the Hillsborough River, Palm River, Little Manatee River or Alafia River, removal may be prohibited per [Hillsborough County Land Development Code 04.01.06](#).

## Other Considerations

- For **Right of Way (ROW) trees**, a separate permit may be required by the ROW use team for work conducted in this area if the right of way is County maintained.
- Even if a tree does not need a permit to be removed, you may have to plant a tree to ensure your lot meets the minimum number of lot/shade trees required. [Hillsborough County Land Development Code Section 06.06.03B](#) specifies the minimum number of required lot/shade trees.
- [Certain trees are exempt](#) and will not require a permit for removal, regardless of size.
- [Grand Oaks](#) are governed by more stringent requirements.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## ■ Do I need a permit from Hillsborough County?

These guidelines for tree removal permits are only for properties in “Unincorporated” Hillsborough County. Properties in the jurisdiction of the [City of Tampa](#), [Temple Terrace](#), or [Plant City](#), would need to apply for tree removal through those municipalities. Visit the [Hillsborough County Property Appraiser’s](#) office to find out if your property is in unincorporated Hillsborough County.

## ■ Do I need a permit to remove a dangerous tree (House Bill 1159)?

Yes, the standard rules for tree removal apply to dangerous trees. However, legislation was passed in 2019 that eliminates the requirement for a homeowner to obtain a permit from a local municipality **if an ISA Certified Arborist or Licensed Landscape Architect** can provide documentation that the tree is dangerous according to current arboricultural standards.

The County asks that if you do have your tree(s) declared/documentated as dangerous, by an ISA Certified Arborist or Licensed Landscape Architect, you or the arborist/landscape architect send that documentation or report to the County as an official record of that declaration.

## ■ How do I find an ISA Certified Arborist?

You can search for an ISA Certified Arborist by name or location by visiting [www.treesaregood.org](http://www.treesaregood.org).

## ■ Do I need a permit to remove a dead tree?

A totally dead tree with no green leaves (zero living tissue) or life in it will not require a permit as long as the tree is not located in an environmentally sensitive area, such as a wetland, wetland setback or wetland conservation area. Remember, during certain seasons some species of trees can drop their leaves until spring. That tree is not dead. Consult with an ISA Certified Arborist to evaluate your tree. Always take pictures of the dead tree before removal and be sure to save those pictures.

Totally dead trees (zero living tissue) may not require a permit, however, the removed tree may require replacement. Please contact our staff or consult with an ISA Certified Arborist.

## ■ What is required for a tree removal application to be approved?

The tree must have health issues or be causing damage that cannot be otherwise resolved without removing the tree. Sidewalk/driveway damage can many times be resolved by root pruning. A certified arborist can do root pruning and determine if that will resolve the cause of the damage.

## ■ Will the County send someone out to look at my tree to tell me if I need a permit?

No, that would be the function of a consulting (private) arborist. We may conduct a field evaluation of your tree(s) to determine if a permit will be granted to remove your tree.

## ■ Do I need a permit to trim, cut, or prune my trees?

No, however, there is a limit to the amount of pruning you can do to a tree in a growing season.

25% of the trees canopy is the maximum recommended. Excessive pruning may result in corrective or enforcement actions. Consultation with an ISA Certified Arborist is recommended before you begin work.

Grand Oaks must be pruned according to ANSI A 300 Pruning Standards. It is recommended that a certified arborist must be on site during the pruning of the Grand Oak.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## ■ What is a Grand Oak?

In unincorporated Hillsborough County, it's any oak tree (genus *Quercus*) that is evaluated by an ISA Certified Arborist that meets the following criteria:

- Minimum of 34" diameter at 4.5 feet up from the ground
- Symmetrical canopy spread that meets 175 points or greater
- Is in good or better condition

## ■ How do I know if my oak is a grand oak?

An ISA certified arborist has an ISA required check list and process to determine if an oak is grand. Hillsborough County's [Grand Oak Regulations](#) provide a useful guide.

## ■ Can I prune/cut/trim the part(s) that hangs over my property line?

Yes, but you cannot cut the tree in half or improperly cut/prune/trim. Improper pruning/trimming/cutting are detrimental to the tree. You have every right to prune branches that extend or hang over your property line, however, you must follow good, established pruning practices while doing so. Over-pruning or side-cutting a tree could result in enforcement activities and/or mitigation - not to mention potential civil issues between you and your neighbor.

Always consult with an ISA Certified Arborist before pruning a boundary line or property line tree.

## ■ What can I do if I suspect that my neighbor's tree is dangerous?

You can submit a [Code Violation Request](#) to have County staff assess the tree.

## ■ How can I verify a permit was obtained if I suspect a tree was removed without a permit?

A [search](#) by address can be conducted without an account on the [HillsGovHub](#) portal to verify a permit.

## ■ What happens if I don't get a permit from the County, and I remove/cut down my tree anyway?

If the tree removal is reported to the County and investigated, and you did not get a permit nor do you have a letter declaring the tree dangerous (by an ISA Certified Arborist or licensed Landscape Architect), you run the risk of facing corrective enforcement which can include monetary penalties and/or mitigation. Penalties include paying \$65.00\* per diameter inch for the tree that was removed and/or replanting (mitigation) of an equivalent amount of DBH inches in trees. For example, removing a 20" DBH tree without a permit will result in a fine of \$1,300.00.

\*All fees are subject to change.

## ■ What is the cost of a tree removal permit?

The current fee for a tree removal permit is \$81.65 per parcel (not per tree). The fee covers all trees to be removed within the first 5 acres of land per parcel. If the property is larger than 5 acres and you are requesting to remove multiple trees, an additional fee of \$24.95 per additional acre will apply.

Tree removal permit fees will not be refunded on applications that are denied as the cost of the permit is to cover the processing, review and evaluation of the request.

## ■ How do I apply?

Applications can be submitted via the [HillsGovHub portal](#). A [visual walkthrough](#) is available.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## ■ How long does it take?

Generally it takes approximately 3-4 weeks from the time we receive the application. We send out an arborist to review the trees on site. To receive it faster, usually within 5 days, you can have a certified arborist evaluate the tree and fill out the arborist sections of the tree removal permit application. A certified arborist is not required to apply for the permit.

## ■ Can I get my own permit to remove my tree(s) or do I need a certified arborist to apply for the tree removal permit?

Homeowners may apply for their own tree removal permit. You do not need a certified arborist to apply but you do have that option. That is why that form is provided. Using a Certified Arborist is completely optional.

If you use an ISA Certified Arborist to complete the application, and he/she feels the tree meets the criteria of the code, the arborist may complete that form which will relieve staff of having to come to your home to inspect the tree, which allows us to issue the permit to you usually within 5 days.

## ■ What if I am not comfortable pulling my own permit and/or filling out paperwork? What can I do?

You may have your tree service or contractor apply for the permit on your behalf. In the application package, you will find a form that you will have to sign authorizing another person to complete all the paperwork. Tree services regularly do this for their clients and are likely familiar with the process.

## ■ How can I check the status of my permit or get a copy of the permit?

Sign in to your [HillsGovHub](#) account to check the status of your permit. HillsGovHub provides regular updates via email. The contact on your application will receive a copy of the permit via email once it is approved. Please check your SPAM or JUNK folder.

Additionally, a [search](#) by address can be conducted without an account on the [HillsGovHub](#) portal.

Once reviewed a permit may receive one of the following statuses:

- Approved
- Approved with Conditions - may include the required replacement of the tree and/or payment to the Restoration Fund.
- Partial Approval - occurs when one tree is approved but others may be denied.
- Denied - occurs when the tree is healthy and/or the damage it is creating can be resolved by other means, such as root pruning.

## ■ My permit was denied. What are my options?

You can appeal within 30 days to staff. Your appeal can include things like repair bills, photos of damage we could not see, engineering reports, and any other pertinent information relative to the denial of the permit. If staff upholds the decision to deny the removal, you can request that your appeal be heard by the Land Use Hearing Officer (LUHO). Going to a LUHO hearing has added fees, currently \$1985.82, in addition to that of your tree removal application. Please remember, fees are subject to change.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## ■ What is a street tree and why am I required to have them?

A street tree is generally located in the grassy space between the sidewalk and the street. Typically that portion of land is not actually owned by the lot owner but owned either by the County or another private property owner like a HOA or CDD. Customarily, the homeowner maintains their street tree relative to pruning and care. The [street tree list](#) has many species of trees that are very unlikely to do any damage to utilities or driveways, including palms.

Many homes in Hillsborough County are required to have a street tree(s) because when their neighborhood was developed the land development code required it. Some older neighborhoods or out-lying areas, or areas that are not in a planned development (PD) may not require a street tree. To find out if you have a street tree requirement you may submit a [Natural Resources Inquiry](#).

## ■ What is a lot tree and why am I required to have them?

A lot tree is generally a [shade tree](#) and/or combination of [shade tree/ornamental tree\(s\)](#). Many factors determine exactly what your specific lot is required to have. The [Land Development Code \(LDC\) Section 6.06.03 B](#) dictates the requirement for required lot trees and is based on the square footage of the lot. For assistance with your lot tree requirement you may submit a [Natural Resources Inquiry](#).

## ■ Can the County recommend a tree service?

The County cannot recommend one service or company; however, we recommend adhering to the following tips when selecting a tree service for your specific needs.

1. Check [sunbiz.org](#) for business records on the company.
2. Request a copy of the permit to verify if there are requirements for replanting of which you may not be aware.
3. Get everything promised in writing.
4. Verify the vendor's physical address.
5. Check social media for rating and comments from your neighbors and community.
6. Ask for proof of their worker's compensation insurance and liability insurance policies.
  - Worker's Compensation Insurance protects you if the worker gets injured on your property.
  - Liability Insurance will cover damages to your property.

## ■ Where can I get answers to questions I don't see listed here?

Please submit a [Natural Resources Inquiry](#). Alternatively you may email your question to our staff at [naturalresources@HCFLGov.net](mailto:naturalresources@HCFLGov.net).

**Disclaimer:** The information listed in this guide applies to the most common situations encountered during a tree removal project. There may be specific situations not covered in this guide. The information contained here does not supersede regulations established in the Hillsborough County Land Development Code. If you suspect your situation may fall outside of the parameters listed in this guide, please consult with our Natural Resources team.