
3 STEPS TO TREE PRESERVATION

Step 1) Plan Ahead

To incorporate tree preservation in the design process, you will need to hire a Certified Arborist to perform a site and tree evaluation. An Arborist will be able to tell you which trees have the best chance to survive during and after construction.

Construction around trees can be done successfully when it is a part of the design process. Not all trees are worthy of saving especially if they may become liabilities for future homeowners. Your Certified Arborist will assist you with these decisions. It may be more desirable in the long run to remove trees prior to construction and plant new trees after construction is completed. However, when valuable mature trees are present, the effort and expense to preserve them is worthwhile. Mature trees take many years to grow and their environmental benefits are exponential in comparison to smaller trees.

Step 2) Design Your Project to Accommodate Tree Preservation

Some things to consider when evaluating the site and its trees include:



Protect the Critical Root Zone (CRZ)

The best way to protect trees on a construction site is to avoid disturbing the roots within the critical root zone (CRZ). The CRZ of a tree extends well beyond the spread of its branches. The CRZ is a function of tree size, health, and how the species responds to construction damage. For example, the critical root zone of a young, vigorous red maple (tolerant to construction damage) is much smaller than that of an old, declining yellow poplar (low tolerance for construction damage).

Generally, the CRZ can be calculated as 1.5 X the diameter at breast height (DBH) of the tree. For example, a 20-inch DBH tree would require 30 feet of area of no disturbance. The size of the critical root zone should be adjusted according to the specific tree and site factors. The tree preservation fence must protect the CRZ.



Root Prune trees are to be preserved

Root prune along the CRZ where there is construction activity such as grade changes should be preserved. Roots are cut with a specialized machine that provides for a cleaner cut than with a backhoe. When roots greater than 2 inches in diameter are exposed, they should be further pruned by hand using a sharp hand saw. New roots will regenerate at the point of this cut.



Groups of trees

Preserving stands of trees or tree save islands is encouraged because groups of trees often tolerate construction disturbance better than individual trees.



Transplanting trees

If a good quality tree needs to be removed because it is located where construction activities are planned, look for opportunities to transplant it to another location on the site. This works best for small trees less than 10 inches diameter at breast height.

Step 3) Protect Trees During Construction

Construction activities such as trenching, slope cut, soil compaction, grade changes and stock piling of materials damage trees. Please note the following protection measures:



Install Tree Preservation Fencing

Tree preservation fencing is the most effective technique to preserve the existing conditions around the tree. Fencing types can be 48 inches high 14-gauge welded wire secured on 2-inch metal posts or a 6-foot high chain link fence on moveable blocks. Fencing must be installed prior to the entrance of any equipment on the site. Securing "Keep Out, Tree Save Area" signs onto the fencing alerts workers that the location is off limits. Plan in advance locations for storage of excavated soils and parking. Activities that one would think would never occur such as burning of materials and dumping of toxic fluids (paint thinner, gas) routinely happen next to the trunk in the shade of a tree's canopy.



Don't Trench the Roots

Great damage may occur when trenching for utilities and foundations or where grade lowering is performed close to the trunk of the tree. Each root that is cut reduces the tree's ability to supply water and nutrients to the leaves. Trenching within a few feet of the trunk of the tree can reduce the functional support system of the tree and create a hazard or high risk tree. Reroute utilities outside of the critical root zone (CRZ) or require them to be tunneled. If trees cannot be safely preserved then they should be removed prior to construction.



Don't Change the Grade

When soil is cut away near a tree, portions of the tree's roots are cut away as well. Likewise, if fill is added near a tree, portions of the tree's roots are smothered (tree roots need oxygen too). Changes in grade also may influence the water table and the amount of water available to the tree. Retaining walls are often the best way to preserve larger amounts of existing grade around trees. Retaining walls can be used whether the area next to the tree is excavated or filled.



Don't compact the soil

Soil compaction occurs when equipment passes over the soil and squeezes out the air spaces leaving no source of oxygen for the roots below and no pore space for water. In dense compacted soil, roots cease to function and die. Where construction traffic cannot be avoided, a layer of 10 -16 inches of wood chips topped with heavy, non-skid, surfaced plywood or chain link fencing panels can be placed in the area to be compacted.

For information on selecting a Certified Arborist in your area go to the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) website @<http://www.isa-arbor.com> and click on "Find an Arborist."