

Clear low branches and shrubbery from walkways, streets and signs

*It's the duty of all Newport residents and
groundskeepers*

How many times have you had to duck under low tree limbs, or walk out into the street to get around overgrown shrubs and hedges? Have you ever had problems spotting a stop sign or traffic light because a tree branch is in the way? Maybe too, you've found a big branch lying in the street that a tall truck has torn off?

Newport's trees are one of our most precious assets. But they have to compete with people and vehicles for space. Left to grow without management, they



can even become dangerous. Some careful, timely trimming can make the difference.



We're all supposed to keep street-side trees trimmed

The City's Tree and Parks Supervisor, Scott Wheeler, has noticed an increasing number of low-hanging trees, shrubs and hedges infringing on our sidewalks and streets. Sometimes in the past, he and some helpers have been able to do some trimming along major thoroughfares. But his staff is small, and tight City budgets allow almost no outsourcing. They have to care for grounds and trees of more than 50 Newport parks, ball fields, walk areas, roadsides and other green spaces. Talk about being over-stretched!

Besides, officially *it's our own responsibility* as citizens to keep our trees and shrubs from getting in the way of pedestrians, vehicles and traffic signs. This is indicated in the City's ordinance on tree preservation and protection (Chapter 12.36), which seeks to safeguard people in Newport as well as trees and our natural surroundings. Here's what Section 12.36.070.A says:

It shall be the duty of any person(s) owning or occupying real property bordering on any public street or thoroughfare, upon which property there may be trees, to prune in such manner that they will not obstruct or shade street lights, obstruct the passage of pedestrians on sidewalks, obstruct vision of traffic signs or obstruct the view of any street or intersection so as to pose a threat to pedestrian or vehicular safety. The minimum clearance of any overhanging portion thereof shall be eight feet (2.44 m) over sidewalks, and fourteen (14) feet (4.27 m) over all streets and thoroughfares and/or at the discretion of the tree warden;

Neither the Tree Commission nor the Tree Warden seeks to be legalistic. We want to do all we can to help. But if our vast street-side greenery is to be kept both scenic and safe, each property holder has an important role to play in keeping an eye peeled for hazardous overgrowth and doing something about it.

For more information

The Newport Tree Society is providing very helpful information and links about tree care and selection at www.newporttreesociety.org. Two other reliable sites are: www.treesaregood.com and www.plantamnesty.org.

The Cooperative Extension Education Center at the University of Rhode Island has a gardening hotline: 1-800-448-1011 or 401-874-2929. It is staffed by volunteers, Monday-Thursday, 9 am-2 pm. They can send you fact sheets to help with at least some of your questions about trees. Much of the same information is on the web at www.uri.edu/ce/factsheets.

The Newport Public Library has useful books on tree and shrub care, as well as underlying knowledge about plants, soils and ecology. Ask the reference librarian for help in finding them.



Three key steps

As fellow citizens, we Tree Commission members intend to take the following steps. We strongly urge you to take these steps too:

1. Make sure our own trees and shrubs give enough clearance and are not hazards.

Give our own property an inspection right now. If we live in a condo, apartment or group facility, see for ourselves whether any trees/shrubs are less than 8 feet over walkways. Or less than 14 feet above streets. Or hiding nearby traffic signals or signs. If so, call this to the attention of our management. Likewise for our work or business place.

2. Stimulate others in our neighborhoods to attend to this on their properties.

Bring up the subject with our neighbors in a friendly way. Maybe team up with them in doing the trimming, sharing proper tools. Help those who would have problems doing their own trimming.

If we're in a neighborhood association, see about mobilizing a neighborhood-wide tree and shrub trimming effort. If professional tree services are needed, perhaps money can be saved by arranging for these through neighborhood cooperation.

If a property has a hazardous streetside tree situation and the owner isn't willing to cooperate, the City Zoning Inspector can be called upon to help.

If there is a tree on City property along the street near by, and it is hazardous or blocking a traffic sign, the Tree Warden won't mind our removing small low branches. But for anything more than that, we should contact him, and his staff will get onto it.

If one is unsure whether a tree is on City property, the Tree Warden could help to clarify. He's at 848-6496 and swheeler@cityofnewport.com

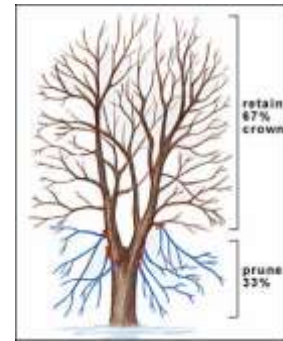
3. Follow up regularly to make sure the trees and shrubs still are not obstructions.

Keep monitoring the situation, especially after storms and when winter ice is on the trees, and after new spring growth has taken place. Maybe link street-side trimming to annual neighborhood cleanups. To trim trees at least once a year is better than to wait so long that major tree surgery is needed. Shrubs may need attention more often than that.

The diagrams on the next page are from the U.S. Department of Agriculture publication, "How to Prune Trees" (USDA, Forest Service, Northeast Area, NA-FR-01-95). The full publication can be seen on the Internet by typing in "USDA how to prune".

Some tree-trimming tips

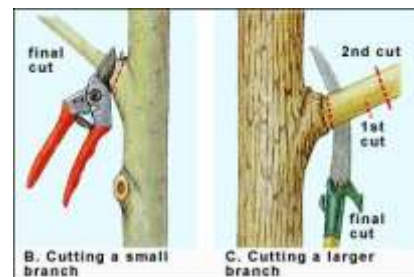
The City's Tree and Parks Supervisor, who is a Rhode Island licensed arborist, has the following suggestions:



1. Don't you yourself try to remove large limbs, use tall ladders or work anywhere near utility wires. Hire a tree-care service that has an R.I. licensed arborist, trained workers, proper equipment, and insurance.

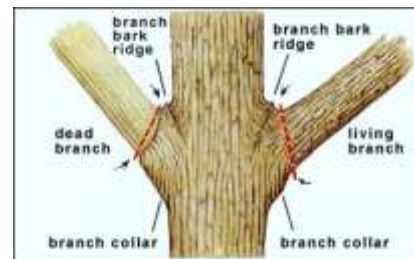
2. If you have to work out in the street, use all necessary safety precautions.

3. If you saw a limb off, 1) make an undercut a foot or two out, 2) saw from the top about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch beyond that, then 3) saw the stub off smoothly at the "collar" next to the main branch. Leave the cut area open; don't coat it over with anything.



4. The best time to prune and reshape a deciduous tree is in the cold months when it is bare of leaves and dormant. A spring-flowering shrub can be trimmed and thinned after the blossoms are gone. An evergreen can be trimmed most any time, though late summer is not so good for many species. A way to keep the size of a pine tree in check is to pinch off the "candles" at the end of branches early in the season.

5. Use proper tools--sharp pruning shears for small branches, and a long-handled lopper or a pruning saw for larger branches.



6. Make the tree or shrub branches look natural. Don't leave stubs or cut everything back to the same point. Thin out dead branches, sprouts and heavy growth.

7. Be prepared to remove a tree or shrub entirely. If it's of any size, have a licensed arborist do it. Landscapes become too crowded. Trees get old and decline. Their limbs become brittle and may decay. To be near them or to work on them yourself can be dangerous.

8. If you replace street-side woody plants, or fill in gaps in your landscape, select species that are not fast-growing, pest-prone, or easily damaged by storms. Make sure no utility lines are underneath where you're digging. (If you phone *Dig Safe* at 1-888-344-7233, local utilities will check that out, without charge.) Set trees back from the street far enough to allow for their mature size.
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