



Do I need a permit to remove a tree?

On private property outside of critical areas, shoreline management areas, or the right-of-way, the following situations **do not** require a permit to remove a tree:

- A. Trees less than 6 inches diameter at 4.5 feet above the ground.
- B. Normal and routine maintenance where less than 25% of the live foliage is removed, and no tree topping occurs.
- C. Emergency work where the tree poses a high risk to surrounding targets. However, a retroactive permit is required in this situation.

The following situations require tree removal permits:

A. Minor tree removal permit

A minor tree removal permit is required for tree removal in residential areas, outside of critical areas and shorelines, in the following situations:

- i. For significant tree removal in excess of the allowed limit of tree removal per year(s), see table 19.26.060-1.
- ii. Or for any exceptional tree removal.
- iii. Or for removal of trees that would result in a lot going below the required minimum tree credits.

Table 19.26.060-1 Significant Tree Removal Allowances, No Permit Required¹

Property Size	Maximum allowance for significant tree removals per 12 months
Under 5,000 square feet	1
5,000 to 10,000 square feet	2
10,001 to 20,000 square feet	4
20,001 square feet or greater	5

¹If the property is below the required minimum tree credits trees cannot be removed without a minor tree removal permit.

B. Major tree removal permit

A major tree removal permit is required when proposing to remove significant or exceptional trees on undeveloped lots or those undergoing development.

C. Vegetation management plan

A Vegetation Management Plan is required for properties located in a shoreline management area, critical area, or critical area buffer where vegetation is proposed to be disturbed, including tree removal.

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[Critical areas](#) subject to vegetation management plan review include geologically hazardous areas, frequently flooded areas, wetlands, and streams. All vegetation is regulated in a critical area, the significant and exceptional designations do not apply.

- All trees are regulated in critical areas, significant and exceptional designations do not apply.

D. Tree pruning permit

A Tree Pruning Permit is required for properties located in a shoreline management area, critical area, or critical area buffer. [Critical areas](#) subject to tree pruning permit review include geologically hazardous areas, frequently flooded areas, wetlands, and streams. Tree pruning (less than 25% live canopy in critical areas, buffers, and shoreline management areas.

- All trees are regulated in critical areas, significant and exceptional designations do not apply.

E. Right-of-way (ROW) permit

For tree removal, pruning, or planting in the public ROW. This is typically the area extending from the street to the back edge of the sidewalk, although it can vary across the city.

- All trees are regulated in the ROW, significant and exceptional designations do not apply.



Residential Tree Removal and Replacement

Activity	FORMS	Minor tree removal permit	Major tree removal permit	Vegetation management plan (\$300 + costs)	Tree pruning permit (free)	Public Works right-of-way (ROW) Permit	No Permit
Private Property Not Associated with Development							
Removal of significant tree(s) on private property pursuant to Table 19.26.060-1 or removal of non-significant trees							X
Removal of trees that result in a lot below the minimum tree credits		X					
Removal of significant trees beyond the allowed removal pursuant to Table 19.26.060-1.		X					
Removal of exceptional trees.		X					
Removal of tree(s) in a shoreline management area, critical area or buffer				X			
Removal or pruning of MORE than 25% of the live canopy of a tree(s) in a shoreline management area, critical area or buffer				X			
Removal or pruning of LESS than 25% of the live canopy of a tree(s) in a shoreline management area, critical area or buffer					X		
Private Property associated with development							
Any tree removal			X				
Public Works and ROW Removal/planting/pruning of tree(s) in public right-of-way							
No critical area						X	
Critical area				X OR	X	AND X	

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When is tree replacement required?

A. Going below the required minimum tree credits

A minimum tree credit density is required on each property pursuant to **Table 19.26.050-1**.

For example, if a property with a net buildable area of 10,000 square feet, 10 tree credits are required. If the property has two 24-inch oak trees, each worth five tree credits, the property would meet the minimum required tree credits. If the property owner wants to remove one oak tree because it meets the hazard tree criteria, they would be required to replace the tree because it would result in a lot below the required tree credits. The minimum tree credits could be met with five 2-inch caliper deciduous trees, each worth one tree credit (five trees x 1 credit = 5 credits + 5 existing credits = 10 tree credits). Alternatively, if planting 6-foot-tall evergreen coniferous trees, each worth 2 tree credits, the minimum required tree credits can be met by planting three trees (three trees x 2 credits = 6 credits + 5 existing credits = 11 tree credits). Additionally, a combination of deciduous and evergreen trees can be used to reach the minimum required tree credits.

See the [Residential Tree Credit Fact Sheet](#) for additional information.

B. Removing healthy significant trees beyond the allowances in Table 19.26.060-1

Generally, when removing more than the allowed number of healthy significant trees replacement is required at a one (1) to one (1) ratio. This helps to slow canopy loss across Burien and reach our goal of 40 percent canopy cover by 2038.

C. During development

Removal and replacement regulations are different during development. See the Tree Protection, Removal, and Replacement Fact Sheet for additional information.



Definitions:

19.10.341 Measurement of tree diameter at standard height

Diameter at standard height (DSH), which means the diameter of a tree trunk measured at 4.5 feet above average grade, is used in determining the diameter of existing trees. Where a tree has a branch(es) or swelling that interferes with the measurement at 4.5 feet above average grade or where a tree tapers below this point, the diameter is measured at the narrowest point below 4.5 feet. For trees located on a slope, the 4.5 feet is measured from the average of the highest and lowest ground points or, on very steep slopes where this is not possible, the lowest practical point on the uphill side. Where a tree splits into several trunks close to ground level, the DSH for the tree is the square root of the sum of the DSH for each individual stem squared (example with 3 stems: $DSH = \text{square root} [(stem1)^2 + (stem2)^2 + (stem3)^2]$).

19.10.545.1 Tree

A woody plant, that has one or several dominant trunks, each with a diameter at standard height of 3 inches or greater, that reaches a mature height greater than 15 feet.

1. **Tree, Exceptional:** Any tree 30 inches diameter at standard height, any tree identified in Table 19.26.040-1, or a tree designated as a Heritage Tree.
2. **Tree, Hazard:** A hazard tree is a tree that meets all the following criteria:
 - A. A tree with a combination of structural defects and/or disease which makes it subject to a high probability of failure;
 - B. Is in proximity to moderate to high frequency targets (persons or property that can be damaged by tree failure);
 - C. The assessed tree has a high to extreme risk rating using the International Society of Arborists Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) method in its most current form; and
 - D. The hazard condition of the tree cannot be lessened with reasonable and proper arboricultural practices, nor can the target be removed or restricted.
3. **Tree, Healthy:** A tree with less than twenty five percent (25%) crown decline and dieback of the canopy, with normal leaf development, although minor deficiencies might be present. Minor pest problems might be present, but controllable. Minor trunk or branch defects might be present, but with good response wood or wound closure.
4. **Tree, Significant:** An existing healthy tree which, when measured at the diameter at standard height, has a minimum diameter of six (6) inches and is not an exceptional tree. Hedges made of Leyland cypress (*Cuprocyparis leylandii*), arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), laurel (*Prunus lusitanica* and *Prunus laurocerasus*), or holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) are not considered to be significant trees and may be trimmed or removed. Any tree on the prohibited plants and trees list (BMC 19.10.408) is not considered a significant tree.

19.10.545.3 Tree pruning

The intentional removal of a tree's branches in order to reduce the live canopy of the tree by no more than twenty five percent (25%) during any consecutive twelve (12) months, in accordance with the current version of ANSI A300 Part 1. Pruning Specifications. Trimming more than twenty five percent (25%) of a tree's canopy during any consecutive twelve (12) months shall be considered tree removal.

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19.10.545.4 Tree topping

The act of removing whole tops of trees, or indiscriminate removal of large branches and/or trunks from the tops of trees and leaving stubs or lateral branches that result in the disfigurement of the canopy and compromises the health and structure of the tree. Tree topping is considered to be tree removal.

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