

City of Madison Streets & Urban Forestry Division

ONBOARDING VIDEO #5

Frequently Asked Questions – Urban Forestry

March 2026



What does Urban Forestry do?

- Manage & maintain 100,000 public trees along the terrace
- Primary tree support and advocate for public trees across the city.
- Source of information & expertise for the entire community about trees



Who we are

- Professionally trained and credentialed staff
 - Much of the staff has degrees in Urban Forestry
 - ISA certified arborists
 - ISA urban forestry professional
 - ISA tree risk assessment qualifications (TRAQ) [hazard assessment]
 - Wisconsin certified pesticide applicator



What are the benefits of an urban forest?

- Reduce heat island effects
- Improve air quality
- Improve stormwater run-off management
- Lower homeowner's cooling costs in the summer
- Provide habitat for wildlife
- Improve physical and mental health, and generally improve the quality of life.

They're redoing the road near my home and I'm worried about the trees.

Urban Forestry is part planning process for Engineering projects, and they act as an advocate to keep the trees in place and add trees where possible.



New Tree Protection Ordinances

In 2025, new tree protection measures were passed

- **Increase protection zone around street trees in construction areas**
 - For every one inch of a tree trunk's diameter, there must be one-foot of a tree protection zone around the tree
 - Ordinance allows for the zone to be increased or decreased with direct approval of Urban Forestry
- **Suspending or revoking permits for tree protection violations**
 - Applies to street occupancy permits
- **Establishes a Street Tree Replacement Fund**
 - If there is an agreement between Urban Forestry & a developer that a tree cannot be saved, then the entity removing the tree will pay into the tree replacement fund equal to the value of the removed tree so Urban Forestry can improve the City's canopy

There's something wrong with the city tree. Help!

Urban Forestry responds to calls for service as soon as possible.

- <http://www.cityofmadison.com/ReportaProblem>
- 608-266-4816

Common Problem Examples:

- Trimming branches that are touching a roof
- Dangling / hanging limbs
- Trimming branches blocking a sidewalks.
- Hornets nests and wasp nests.
 - If the nest is low or poses some other hazard.



The right of way tree is causing problems. Will Urban Forestry remove it?

Forestry *will not* remove trees for

- disrupting sewer lines,
- dropping leaves or seed pods,
- disturbing sidewalks or driveways,
- having squirrels,
- hampering sunlight for a garden or solar panels,
- homeowner preference:
 - such as aesthetics
- and many other reasons



Why are trees removed?

- Dead
- Dying
- Public safety
- Certain projects when there is no other choice

What's the status of the emerald ash borer?



Pre-emptive removals are done.

Treatment ongoing.

Will investigate calls of concerns about a tree being infested.

What's going on with the spongy moth?

Spongy moth is endemic to our region.

Population spikes are cyclical and weather dependent.

There was a spike in 2022 that continued into 2023.

Population crashed in 2024.

More information about the moth can be found at

www.cityofmadison.com/SpongyMoth



The city took down a tree in front of my house and the stump is still there. What's going on?

The stump will be removed. Process takes time.

- Balancing priorities
- Equipment & staffing
- Locating underground utilities
- Depends on when tree is removed, too.



Will the city plant canopy trees?



- The city's **community tree canopy** goal is 40% - in other words, if seen from overhead while trees are fully leafed out, the goal is to only see 60% of the ground.
- Yes, large trees creating a wide canopy will be planted where it is appropriate to do so.
- Planting canopy trees in places with overhead wires is unhealthy for the tree and possibly deadly for people who have to trim them.

The trees on my street have never been pruned. Why?



For trees planted within the last 10 years, Forestry aims to prune them every three to five years.

For older trees, the goal is to prune them once every 10 years.

Why can't I just trim the right-of-way trees myself?

MGO 10.101

Doing the work, but doing it the wrong way can make a problem worse and can damage the tree.

Our arborists are professionals trained in the proper maintenance of trees and will fix the issues safely the first time.



There's a tree emergency! What do I do?



Call 911



My neighbor has a tree that's in rough shape. What do I do?

Urban Forestry supports Building Inspection for these concerns.

Forestry does not inspect private trees on their own.

BI would then issue an order to the homeowner that has the problem tree. And a private service would be needed to perform any required work.

Can a resident choose the tree that's planted on their terrace?

No.

Trained city staff ensure the correct tree is planted so it can thrive in the limited right of way space.

Need to factor in other tree species nearby, overhead wires, and other concerns.

To create a diverse canopy, arborists strive to have 3 different tree species per block; and want no more than 30% of the same family; 20% of the same genus, and 10% of the same species citywide.



What tree is in front of my house?

We have a Tree Inventory of public trees on the Urban Forestry website (www.cityofmadison.com/Forestry).

You can enter your address into the inventory and learn about the tree species and the benefits they provide your home.

Kentucky Coffeetree at 605 Spruce St

Site

Species

No transfer sources for this site



Species w
Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)



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