

Are Your Trees at Risk?

During the warm and often unstable summer weather, we have experienced a handful of strong thunderstorms this season. Many of you may have experienced twig or even branch failure during these severe events, which may have created a heightened sense of fear. Please keep in mind that while every tree has the potential to fall, only a small number that fall, actually strike something or someone (a target). Remember that as trees grow into large mature trees, the numerous benefits (environmental, social, communal, and economic) provided to residents within our community increase as well, generally outweighing associated risks.

With that said, it is every homeowner's responsibility to ensure the safety of the trees on their property. Homeowners can be on the lookout for several common defects which may increase the level of risk associated with a tree. However, routine tree care will help identify these items and determine which of your trees may have an unacceptable level of risk.

Signs of possible defects to watch for include the following:

- Cavities, cracks, or decayed wood in trunk or large branches
- Sparse canopy with lots of dead branches
- Trunk lean causing soil heaving on one side
- Topped tree or heavy pruning (see Feb. 2019 Lake Ridge Today)
- Heavy regrowth from topping, power line clearance pruning, or other pruning
- Recent changes to the site or construction near the tree
- Nearby trees have failed or died
- Mushrooms present at base of trunk
- Recent branch failure
- Decay presence in old pruning wounds
- Several branches from one union on trunk
- Unusual color or size of leaves
- Forked trunks of equal size

Trees are an asset to your property and your community so they deserve the very best care you can provide. If any of these defects are discovered, contact your local ISA Certified Arborist or ASCA Registered Consulting Arborist (www.asca-consultants.org) who also holds the Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist), to further evaluate the level of risk. Once the level of risk has been determined, additional actions may be necessary to reduce the likelihood of failure. Four general options are:

- Target removal: Not all targets can be relocated (e.g. your house), but some (vehicles, playground equipment, etc.) can be easily moved out of harm's way.
- Pruning: If only certain branches (dead or damaged) are causing the risk, then pruning those branches can decrease or eliminate the risk. It is best to hire an ISA Certified Arborist since improper pruning may cause a decline in tree health.
- Cabling: Installing a cable, brace, or other physical support system for the weak branches can increase stability of weak branches.
- Routine tree care: Healthy trees are less likely to fail. Make sure your tree has adequate water and nutrients (if needed), is properly mulched, and monitor any pests.
- Tree removal: When the risk outweighs the benefits of retaining the tree, it should be removed. Look to replace the tree if possible.

Sustainable Landscaping

By Nick Drunasky



Acer saccharinum, silver maple. Jack Baggett, Fairfax County

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