

Maintaining your trees, the proper way

This time of year, residents often spend hours outside, maintaining the yard, planting flowers, and maybe even pressure washing the house and driveway. Residents should also be prepping their trees for this hurricane season.

To help with the process, the city's new arborist, Zach Harris, answers some questions and offers advice on what residents need to know and should be doing.

What can residents do now to prepare for Hurricane season?

Residents should take a good look around their property, paying close attention to dead or dying trees and limbs adjacent to or near a structure. It is not the worst thing to have limbs over a house so long as they are healthy.

What is a common mistake people make when maintaining their trees?

Over-pruning, topping, and heading cuts. All of these will increase the likelihood of future failure and will most commonly progress a tree issue than prevent it.

What is the process for trimming trees?

Residents are allowed to trim their own trees, but good practice would be to consult the city arborist or an industry professional when the height or limb is over 6 feet in length.

Routine pruning is allowed without a permit; however, substantial pruning will require a permit for any protected tree within the city. Substantial pruning is greater than ¼ of foliage of a limb or branch and roughly any limb over 8 inches in diameter.

What are the most common trees in residents' yards?

Live Oak, Willow Oak, Water Oak, and Pine

Can residents remove trees?

Residents may remove trees as long as the tree IS NOT of a protected designation. Protected trees are Live Oak, Bald Cypress, and Southern Magnolia at a minimum diameter of 8 inches.

What are three important things residents need to know about their trees?

Does your tree look sick? Did its leaves come back? Are there more dead limbs this year compared to last? Are insects visible around the base or main trunk?

Visible deformations in the support structure, these areas are the trunk and larger limbs.

Look for new or reopening cracks in the cambium (which is the living layer of the tree beneath the bark), large cavities, or the roots appear to be uplifting from the surrounding soil.

Has your tree begun to lean?

If you have any questions or concerns, contact Zach Harris at 228-435-6280 or email zharris@biloxi.ms.us, or visiting online.

About Zach Harris

Zach Harris began working for the City of Biloxi as the city arborist in February of this year. Harris has worked within the tree industry for the better part of 14 years, in New Mexico, North Carolina, Georgia, and areas of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Harris is tasked with preserving and enhancing the safety and value of our Urban Canopy by working with private citizens and commercial tree companies to try and define objectives of tree work in and around properties to ensure that our trees are safe and that the work to be performed fits the criteria of our city ordinances.

"The Gulf Coast wouldn't be the same without our Urban Forested Canopy," says Harris. "The majority of trees here are unique and they help tell the story of Biloxi solely through their presence within the landscape in which we reside."

▶ See the tree ordinance and permitting procedures online at biloxi.ms.us.