

Plan Before You Plant

We sometimes don't pay close attention to the conveniences that are all around us. We have grown so accustomed to having water, power, and telephone service in our homes that we hardly think about how they get there until there is a problem! To avoid some of these problems, homeowners should survey their property for possible conflicts with utility lines, both above and below the ground before planting a new tree.

Utility Lines Above Ground

Most of us are used to seeing overhead lines supplying electricity, telephone, or cable television service, but are not aware of the dangers that they can present. Tall trees growing under utility lines threaten service interruptions if their branches come into contact with wires. Selecting the proper tree species and planting site, away from overhead utilities, can help eliminate service outages and public safety hazards. Planting trees away from power lines protects the appearance of your landscape, and can save utility companies and their rate payers from costly maintenance..

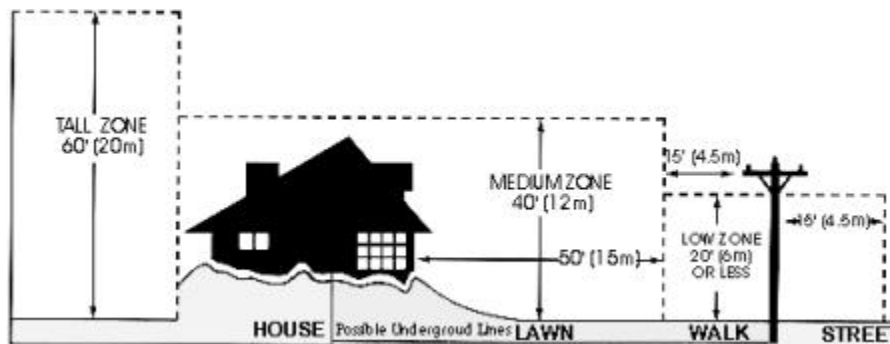
Underground Utility Lines

Utilities such as water, natural gas, and sewage can be harder to recognize, and can present problems if a tree's root system grows too close to these underground lines. A tree's root system is often larger than the branch spread above the ground. For the most part, tree roots and underground utility lines coexist without problems. However, when a tree is planted too near utility lines, damage to the root system of tree is a common result when they must be dug up for repairs.

The biggest danger to homeowners exists during the planting of new trees. Before you decide to plant, you should check with your local utility companies to determine the location of all underground utility lines. Accidentally digging into utility lines can result in personal injury, or service interruption. Often utility lines are closer to the surface than we think, so knowing their exact position is the best way to avoid trouble.

Planting Trees Around Homes

This illustration indicates approximately where trees should be planted in relation to utility lines.



- **Tall Zone** - Appropriate area for trees that grow as tall as 60 feet. Should be planted at least 35 feet from the house to allow for root development and to minimize damage to the house.
- **Medium Zone** - Appropriate for trees that grow up to 40 feet tall. Should have planting areas at least four to eight feet wide. These trees provide decoration or framing for your house.
- **Low Zone** - For trees that grow no more than 20 feet tall. Must be planted in an area extending at least 15 feet on either side of the utility wires. Low zone trees are good for areas with limited growing space, such as narrow planting areas (less than four feet wide).

Plan Before You Plant

Selecting the right tree for the location is the first step to lowering your risk of damage to both home and property. Proper tree choice and placement also enhances your property value, and prevents costly and sometimes unsightly maintenance trimming.

The City of Milpitas will be planting new city street trees in residential neighborhoods this Fall. For more information on tree planting, contact the Public Works Department at 408-586-2601. This article is provided as part of a public education campaign on trees in the City of Milpitas. Copyright International Society of Arboriculture. Used with permission.