

THE PURDUE LANDSCAPE REPORT

Don't Touch Those Wires!

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Homeowners can easily become injured – often fatally – while attempting to trim trees near overhead electrical wires. Though it is tempting to try to save money with this “do-it-yourself” approach, the potential for electrocution is not worth the risk. It is important to recognize when to call a professional arborist.

Terrible accidents can happen when a homeowner uses any type of cutting tools and/or ladders when attempting to trim backyard trees and shrubs. Overhead wires are often unnoticed and is touched by directly or indirectly, causing injury or death.

Examples include:

- A homeowner climbed a ladder to trim a tree branch that was dropping leaves into his above ground swimming pool and causing a nuisance. A branch came in contact with the power line, shocking the man with a jolt of electricity and sending him into cardiac arrest. He fell 20 feet to the ground but was revived by medics at the scene.
- **MATTHEWS, N.C.** — A man trimming trees in a neighborhood was shocked Wednesday morning after a limb fell on power lines, authorities said. Nearby resident Margie Owens knows the man and said he does odd jobs around the neighborhood. According to officials, after the limb fell from pruning, the tree continued to be energized by the power line, leaving the man stuck.
- A Charlotte County man was electrocuted trimming trees in a backyard. The victim was part of a landscaping crew and came in direct contact with a utility line.

Preventable Accidents

Tree limbs can conduct electricity. When trees grow near overhead wires, they can contact the wires and become energized. Trees and wires are dangerous, full of electrical power that can injure or kill humans. How do we know which lines are energized? WE DON'T! Assume all are carrying dangerous electrical current and should be avoided when working around them.

A common house switch carries 120 volts, but the electric flow is usually limited to 10, 15 or 20 amps. A common “house drop”

(service wire) contains 240 volts and up to 20 amps or more. Given the right set of circumstances, even the shock a person gets from a common light switch can kill, but at the same time, it is easier to break electrical contact while standing inside a house. If a person is climbing a ladder or is in the tree, it may be more difficult to break contact with the energized wire. This means that the service line over a typical yard could easily kill a person.

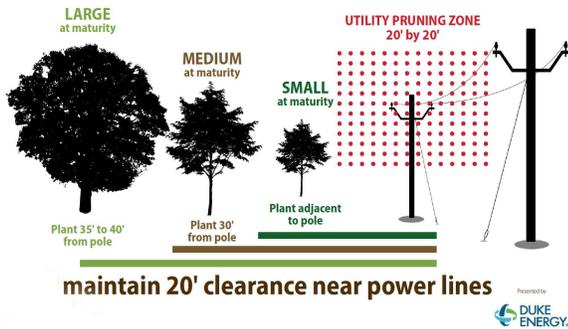


Trees growing into utility lines should be pruned by a qualified arborist.



These powerlines could be “energizing” the tree creating a potential shock hazard for anyone touching the tree. Notice the burning on the new growth.

RIGHT TREE RIGHT PLACE



Utility service providers can help select a tree which is compatible with nearby lines and reduce the need for excessive pruning to maintain safety and reliability.

Here are a few tips to avoid trees in wires:

- Look for power lines before pruning trees and large shrubs. If lines are anywhere near the tree within 10 ft. don't attempt any tree work. Tree care professionals have the training and equipment needed to perform these tasks

safely.

- Never climb a tree in order to prune it. Even if the wires aren't currently touching the tree, remember that the tree's branches will shift once you begin climbing or removing limbs.
- Don't move ladders or long-handled pruning tools around the yard without first looking up. Always read and heed ladder-use safety labels.

Find a professional

Be sure to always hire an insured, tree care professional, preferably and [ISA Certified Arborist](#) with the experience, expertise, and equipment to safely take down or prune trees in wires. Require proof of liability insurance to protect yourself as well.

Another easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the "[Locate Your Local Tree Care Industry Association Member Companies](#)" program. For more information refer to the publication [Trees and Utilities at the Purdue Education Store](#).

Find a certified arborist in your area by going to www.treesaregood.org

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