

How Trees Affect Your Property

The advantages of having trees on your property.



Trees on your property have value, more info inside.

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Introduction to How Trees Affect Your Property

In our neck of the woods, trees are just a foregone conclusion. Fir, pines, and cedars. Dogwoods, maples, and willows. Even a few Siberian elms and English hollies managed to sneak in. Whether it's on a three-acre spread on the outskirts of town or on a postage stamp-sized lot in town, Portland properties have trees aplenty.

But that doesn't necessarily mean every tree is perfect for every situation. Don't like raking leaves? Then maybe a large Japanese maple isn't for you. Or maybe a few grand firs are blocking the view of Mt. Hood. For all the good trees do for us, there are times when they can really become a nuisance.

There are plenty of obvious, and maybe not so obvious, reasons why trees are such a valuable commodity in Portland and the Pacific Northwest in general. Creating oxygen and acting as an air filtration system is probably the most important function trees serve.



Of course, adding a few more trees (or taking a few down) won't affect the overall air quality around your home or neighborhood. Just like clearing your corner lot of all vegetation won't lessen the agony of allergy sufferers in your family.

There are a lot of ways trees can affect your property, good and bad. Let's take a look at some of the things you should consider when it comes to planting or maintaining trees on your land.

Advantages of having trees on your property

Natural Air Conditioning

When summer temperatures start getting high enough, we start looking for ways to keep the house cool during the day. Those of us with air conditioning - even if it's just a window unit or two - just flip a switch to get comfortable. But that can get expensive during a heatwave.

To keep energy consumption low, especially when the home is empty, close everything up to keep the warm air out and the cool air in. By closing the windows in the morning and drawing the blinds, you can keep the sunlight out of your home and interior temperatures low.

But strategically placed trees can be the first line of defense. Trees can keep the sun off the house and drop the temperature on exterior walls by more than 10 degrees! The cooler the exterior wall, the cooler your home. Combined with other methods, trees will help you beat the heat.

The key is to choose the right trees, although proper placement is the ultimate goal here. Morning sun doesn't bring that much heat with it, so planting a grove of maples on the east side of the house won't provide much relief during the day. So think about situating your trees on the west and south-west sides of the home.

We recommend using deciduous trees, the ones that lose their leaves, for these purposes. Their leaves do an excellent job of absorbing the heat and cooling the surrounding area. In the winter, when the leaves have fallen, your home will get the warming benefits of the sun. How considerate!

Depending on the size of the tree when it's planted, it may take a few years to get the full benefit of a wonderfully shady tree. However, if you're looking to buy a new home, you can consider the

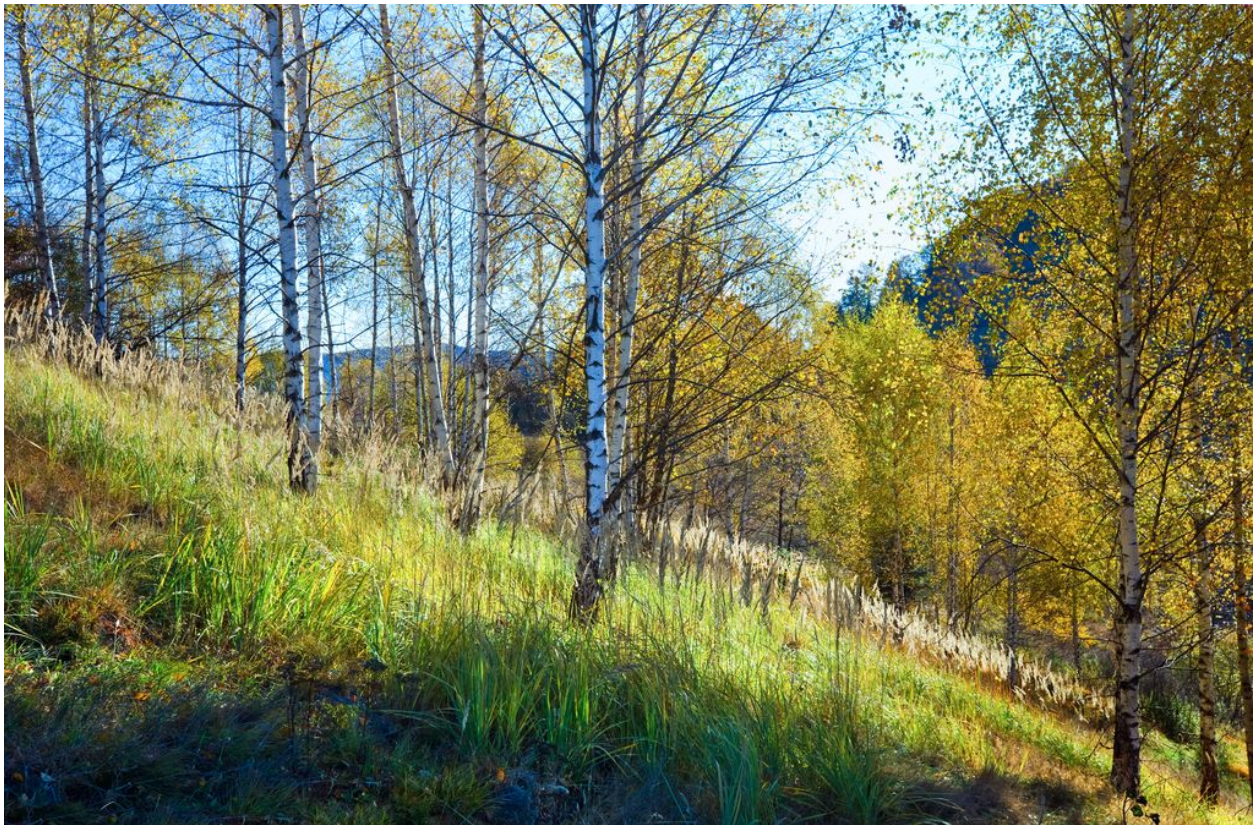


above information when looking at tree size and placement around the home. Keeping the house cool in the summer naturally could be one of your deciding factors.

Soil Erosion Protection

While trees look great above the ground, they also provide a measure of protection to your property. On properties with large or extended sloping, tree roots aid in the prevention of soil erosion. By planting appropriate trees in groups, the root systems can bind the soil together to prevent landslides and other types of soil erosion.

This is a great, environmental way to keep your property from sliding away. Depending on the size of the property, concrete retaining walls can be expensive as concrete prices continue to climb. Installation could cause damage to surrounding areas and poorly placed retaining walls may do more bad than good by holding water in place instead of letting it disperse.



The tree canopy can also protect the soil from above. By preventing rain from bombarding the topsoil constantly during the rainy months, trees provide a natural umbrella of sorts. Trees of varying heights and widths will also act as a windbreak, which also helps prevent soil erosion.

Privacy

Good fences make good neighbors, as the saying goes. Due to code restrictions throughout Portland and its neighborhoods, those fences can only go so high. A few strategically placed trees will provide that extra layer of... neighborliness.

Just understand what kind of tree you'll be planting. Prepare to hear some grumbling on the other side of the fence if you plant a big, leafy tree that they'll have to rake up. And if that tree loses a branch and smashes the fence, that could lead to more teeth-grinding.

A little bit of research can save a lot of headaches. There are plenty of resources online for finding the perfect privacy tree as well as local nurseries if you'd like to talk to someone. They'll be able to tell you which trees provide the most cover while not becoming too overbearing.

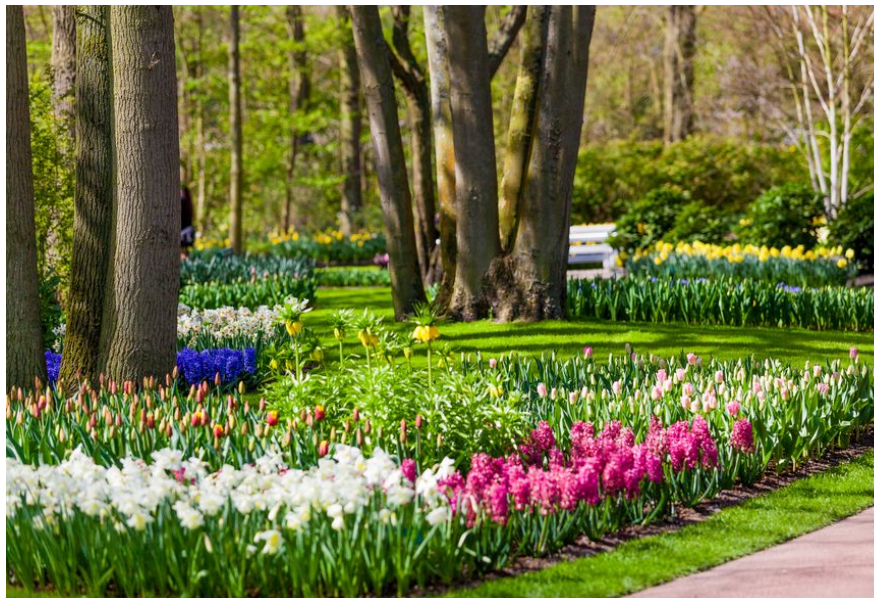
Just like any good neighbor would do.



Tree ROI

Every home needs a little curb appeal, especially if it's about to go on the market. For the most part, this means a nice green lawn, well-defined flower beds popping with color, and other landscaping that's been well maintained. Studies have shown that having a green thumb can produce more than a 100 percent return on investment.

If that thumb is put to good use, of course. That means keeping the tree healthy, removing any loose branches, pruning back dead or dying branches, and keeping the mulch ring free of weeds and



grass. So much of this can be done by the homeowner, although trimming the tree might be best left to a certified arborist.

A neglected tree could have the opposite effect. If everything else in the yard is in full bloom, a dying tree will stick out like a sore thumb. Not only is it unattractive, but it can also be dangerous. Have it removed and replaced with another tree that blends in with the rest of the landscape.

Mature trees are more valuable than saplings. But if you're looking to the future, young trees that are nurtured should fit the bill in five to ten years.

They Just Look Good

Despite all of the things that trees do to help our well-being, they also make the property look great! With all of the colors, shapes, and sizes of trees that thrive in the Portland area - and the Pacific Northwest as a whole - trees anchor the landscaping.

Cherry blossoms in the spring and large, multi-color maple leaves in the fall, and the greens of fir in the winter provide constant color throughout Portland and its neighborhoods. Imagine how your neighborhood would look devoid of trees. Pretty barren, right?

Even in downtown Portland, great care has been taken to ensure the urban areas still have a tree canopy. Imagine Tom McCall Waterfront Park without the aforementioned cherry blossoms signaling the start of spring. How would Portlanders know when to put their fleece away?



Are there Downsides to Having Trees?

One of the things that make so many Portland neighborhoods attractive is the abundance of trees that have been around for 50, 75, and even more than 100 years old. These trees provide a wonderful canopy for the Portland area - even the urban part of Portland has been ranked as having one of the 10-best canopies in the nation.

Hard to imagine there being any disadvantages at all when it comes to tree-lined neighborhood streets. In fact, it's a selling point! But many of these trees were planted or began growing before many neighborhoods were ever established. Trees planted in 1940 could wreak havoc 75 years later.

Trees, for all they offer us, can cause problems too.

Sidewalk Blues

In established neighborhoods, it doesn't take long to come upon a sidewalk that is less than even thanks to a healthy root from a nearby tree. In fact, these sidewalks could be cracked, crumbled, and cratered. Not only is it unsightly, but it can also be a hazard.

When a root has lifted a sidewalk slab by several inches, suddenly a walk on the sunny side of the street becomes a safety issue for even the most able-bodied. Even a few slight cracks over just five feet of sidewalk can cause problems for those using walkers, wheelchairs, or other devices that help with mobility.

It's one of the unfortunate side effects of planting trees that are just too big for the neighborhood. Of course, almost a century ago, it wasn't as much of a concern. Today those trees can cause headaches for walkers and homeowners alike. Because homeowners are the ones who'll have to take corrective steps.



The options aren't always favorable. Removing the offending root may be the most direct route. But depending on the size, location, or how many roots you have to remove, this action could prove fatal for the tree. This course of action should only be performed by a trained arborist.

Plumbing Problems

Homeowners living with older infrastructure are familiar with this issue: tree roots getting into the plumbing. Homes built in the early 1920s almost exclusively used clay sewer pipes. And while it was - and still is - a sturdy product, these systems are beginning to show their almost 100 years of service.

But the pipes don't need to be crumbling for a root gain a foothold. In an effort to expand and look for water sources, roots will investigate any small crack or opening in a pipe. The root continues to grow into the pipe - causing blockages in the line - until it eventually cracks the pipe completely. Either way, it's time to call a plumber.

In newer homes, with concrete, PVC plastic, or even steel sewer pipes in place, tree roots aren't nearly the issue they once were. However, no product is completely infallible. Any shift in the ground can cause joints in any material to move. That's why in many cases the system is encased in concrete for added protection.

Foundation Issues

Tree roots don't stop at the sidewalk nor the plumbing. It's their job to seek out new water sources and find nutrients to bring back to the tree. Depending on the size of the tree, those roots will eventually find their way to your foundation. That's when some serious damage can occur.

Just not in the way you might think. Where they will snake their way into a sewer line, roots are more likely to grow along the foundation. So what's the problem? While the roots move along the foundation, they will affect the soil around the foundation. This could cause settling, which in turn may cause cracks in the foundation.

The type of soil that surrounds the foundation also plays a part. If the dirt is mostly clay, it will compact as the roots move through it, making it harder to grow. When the soil is made up of loose dirt, rocks, and other displaceable material, roots have a much easier path.

As the root grows, it affects the soil around the foundation. If enough of the soil is displaced, that's when the settling occurs. There are a lot of factors at work here, but enough settling could have major implications on the home as a whole.

This is less an issue with newer construction, where root barriers and other steps can be taken to protect the foundation. This could be planting more appropriate trees for the size of the yard or foregoing trees altogether. Although we like the idea of every home having a tree.

Too Much of a Good Thing

Just so long as that tree fits in with everything else you have going on your yard. One of the things we love about the trees is the shade they provide on a sunny day. However, that means it's also shading any other plants you have growing underneath. This means flowers, bushes, and even grass.

With a lack of foliage underneath these trees to help soak up moisture, standing water could become an issue. If tree trunks remain submerged for any amount of time, even if just an inch or two, it could lead to disease and fungal growth. If these problems aren't addressed, it could put the whole tree at risk.

Crrrrraaaaack!

One of the things that make trees so attractive in the backyard can also cause problems if left unattended. Trees with large, outstretched, leaf-filled branches allow for climbing and tire swings, shade, and gentle rustling in the spring and summer. During the winter, those same branches could cause issues.

While Portland does experience four-season weather, our winters are relatively mild for the most part. But we do get the occasional burst of snow and icy weather, and because branches get harder and more brittle during the colder temperatures, falling branches are a concern.

If your property is large enough and the tree is located away from everything, a falling branch isn't a huge concern. Just don't be caught underneath it when it falls! However, if you live in a subdivision surrounded by neighbors on three sides, a falling branch could take out a fence, a shed, or even the side of home!



Many of these ills can be cured with a little planning, especially when planting new trees. With existing trees, sometimes the only remedy is removing the tree. If that's the case, make sure to

call a tree care professional that not only removes the tree but can grind the stump and even plant a new tree in an appropriate place.

Keep An Eye on Your Investment

Trees improve the landscape, the resale value of your home, and the quality of the air we breathe. With a little research and some yearly maintenance, you can add trees that will do nothing but enrich your life. However, poor planning can lead to issues down the road. So make sure you take everything into account before planting that new tree in your yard.

In need of more information and live in the Portland, Oregon area? *Feel free to contact Urban Forest Pro or give us a call - (503) 776-0934.*

GET IN TOUCH