



Tree Conservation Notes

Athens-Clarke County Community Tree Program

Utility Line Clearance Pruning

Trees and utilities are required to share space in our community forest. In 2005, the Community Tree Management Ordinance was passed in Athens-Clarke County. This ordinance outlines the manner in which utility companies are required to conduct their line clearance pruning. All utility pruning must comply with the guidelines set forth by the International Society of Arboriculture and the American National Standards Institute.

The national standards require that utility companies implement directional pruning when maintaining overhead lines; this practice is commonly referred to as natural target pruning (NTP). Directional pruning is accomplished by pruning unwanted branches back to lateral branches or parent stems that are growing away from utility lines. The goal of NTP is to implement biologically sound cuts in such a manner that the remaining limbs are encouraged to grow in a desirable direction. NTP is structurally and biologically better for the trees. Ideally, several cycles of NTP will result in: a healthier tree, better utility service, a safer community forest and less material being removed at future pruning events.

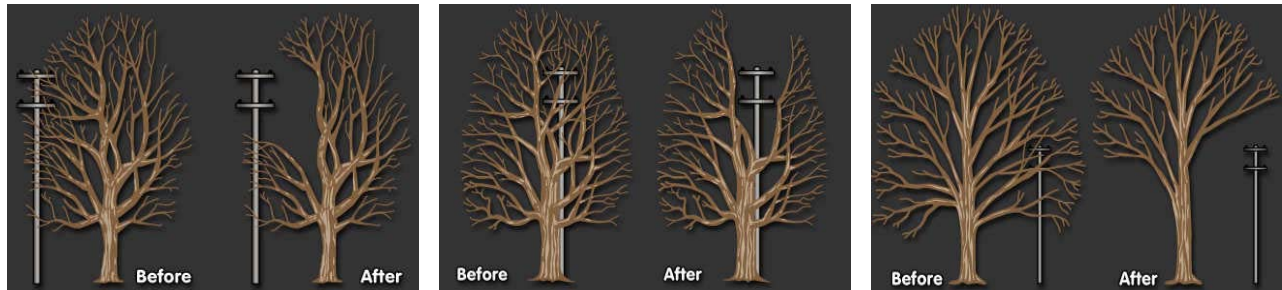


Figure 1. Examples of how natural target pruning should alter tree canopies.

In the past, utility company contractors would prune the least amount of material as they could. These contractors were often paid by the tree or by the mile for their work. This system resulted in pruning cuts that were often harmful to trees. It is often difficult to implement NTP in areas where substandard pruning has been performed. The trees in Athens-Clarke County are now having additional branches removed in order to correctly implement NTP. As these cycles continue, mature trees will adjust and young trees will be initiated to NTP methods. Eventually, utility line clearance pruning will become less noticeable and less damaging to our trees.



Figure 2. Examples of incorrect utility line clearance pruning.

Benefits of Natural Target Pruning

- Biologically better for the tree
- Sprouting is minimized
- Growth is directed away from the lines
- Less material may be removed in future pruning events
- Pruning costs will go down over time
- It creates a safer environment for the community

Drawbacks of Natural Target Pruning

- Initial pruning may not be aesthetically pleasing
- More material may be removed
- It takes more time to implement



Figure 3. Examples of correctly performed natural target pruning.

References:

American National Standards Institute. 2001. *American National Standard for Tree Care Operations – Tree, Shrub, and Other Woody Plant Maintenance – Standard Practices (Pruning)* (A300, Part 1). Tree care Industry Association, Manchester, NH.

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Lilly, S.J. 2001. *Arborist's Certification Study Guide*. International Society of Arboriculture, Champaign, IL.

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