



DeKalb County Homeowner Guide for Tree Removal

The DeKalb County Board of Commissioners has affirmed that the preservation of existing trees is a public purpose that protects the public health, safety, general welfare and aesthetics of DeKalb County and all its citizens.

The DeKalb County Board of Commissioners has given the County Arborist the responsibility to distribute educational materials on the procedures of the tree protection ordinance, the value of maintaining existing trees, and proper methods of tree planting, preservation and care.

DeKalb County requires that a **Notice of Tree Removal** request be submitted to the County Arborist for the removal of more than five (5) trees or a specimen size tree (see below). The written notice (form attached) shall contain a health/risk assessment conducted by an ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) Certified Arborist, a Registered Consulting Arborist or registered/urban forester. The **Notice of Tree Removal** shall be submitted to the DeKalb County Arborist before tree removal operations. Failure to do so is a violation.

A **Notice of Tree Removal** is not required for any tree which has become, or threatens to become, a danger to human life or property as documented by a certified tree professional performing a tree risk assessment. Dead, diseased or hazardous trees may be removed at any time. This assessment shall be conducted by a certified arborist, registered consulting arborist or registered/urban forester.

According to DeKalb County code, a tree is defined as a living, self-supporting, woody perennial plant which has a trunk caliper of two (2") inches or more measured at a point six (6") inches above the ground and which normally attains a height of at least ten (10") feet at maturity usually with one (1) main stem or trunk and many branches.

County Code defines a significant tree as any existing, healthy, living tree eight (8") inches or more in diameter when measured four and one-half feet (4.5') above the ground. This measurement is referred to as diameter at breast height, **DBH**, of the tree

$$DBH = \text{Circumference of Trunk} \div \pi$$

Ex.: 8" DBH = 25" Circumference \div 3.14

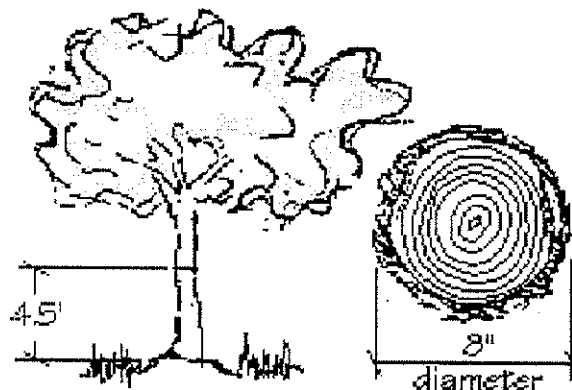


Figure 1. Measuring diameter at breast height, DBH.

A **Notice of Tree Removal** is not required to remove any tree with a **DBH** less than 5”.

The removal of up to five (5) healthy trees on a single-family residential property per calendar year, is allowed without the submittal of a **Notice of Tree Removal** application, provided that these trees are not specimen trees.

The removal of more than five (5) trees or specimen tree(s), from an owner-occupied, single-family lot may be approved if the owner must remove trees in order to build a new structure, to build an addition to or to make improvements to an existing structure, or to improve the health of other trees in the landscape.

It is noted that additional permits, e.g. construction/building, clearing and grubbing, or land-disturbance permit, may be required.

A specimen tree is defined as a tree with a life expectancy of 15 years or more, with a healthy trunk with no extensive decay or hollow/cavity (less than 20%), and no major insect or pathological problem that meets the following size guidelines:

- Overstory (large) trees, ex.: Oak, poplar & pine – **DBH** is greater than or equal to 30 inches (which equates to a circumference of 94.2 inches).
- Understory (small) trees, ex: Dogwood, redbud – **DBH** is greater than or equal to 10 inches (which equates to a circumference of 31.4 inches).

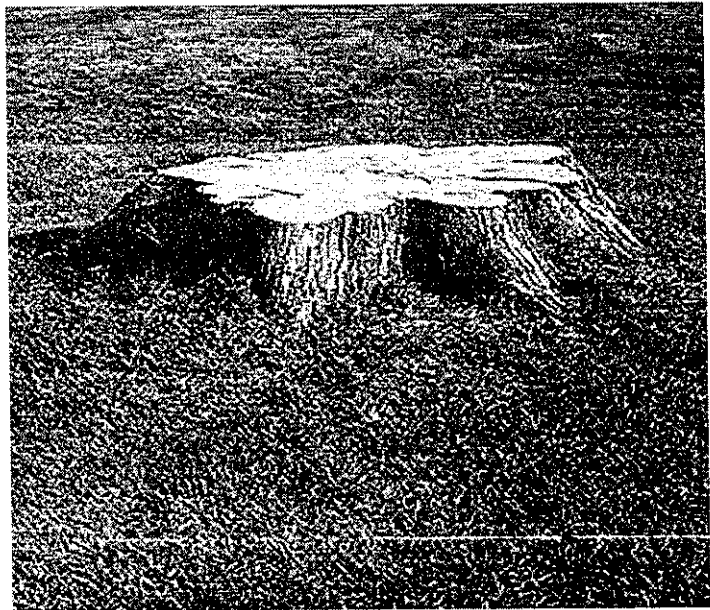


Figure 2. It is recommended that after tree removal, the property owner remove or has the stump grinded down.



You can find certified arborists/registered foresters in the yellow pages or by going to the ISA web site at <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx>, the Georgia Arborist Association, <http://georgiaarborist.org/>, or the Georgia Forestry Commission, <http://www.gfc.state.ga.us/community-forests/management/professional-assistance/index.cfm>.

Please note that special permits may be necessary if trees selected for removal are located within 75' of a stream or other water body/channel. In addition, trees should not be removed from a transition buffer.

Removal of more than five (5) trees but less than ten (10) trees may require a clearing and grubbing permit from the Department of Development and Sustainability.

Removal/clearing of ten (10) or more trees on residential property may be a land-disturbing activity requiring a Land Disturbance Permit. Before filing an application, the applicant shall meet with the County Arborist to discuss the procedure for approval of the tree removal including tree survey, protection, replacement and maintenance plans that may be necessary.

It is important to remember that no-land disturbing activities are allowed in the 75' stream buffer without a variance from DeKalb County. The 75' stream buffer must remain in its undisturbed, natural state of vegetation. Land disturbing activities are not allowed in the 25' stream buffer without a variance from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Environmental Protection Division.

DeKalb County code requires at least 1 or 2 trees in the front yard of zoned residential neighborhoods. In addition the Code requires each lot have an average tree density of 15 units/acre.

If you have any questions you may contact the DeKalb County Arborist at (404) 371-2685.

