What You Should Know About Trees and Your Electric Service

Trees enhance the quality of life in every community, by converting carbon dioxide to oxygen and keeping the air clean. However, diseased and/or weakened trees, along with trees planted too close and growing near power lines, can contribute to power outages when they come in contact with overhead electric lines. National Grid’s goal is to ensure everyone’s safety and deliver reliable electric energy.

Since 2000, National Grid is proud to have repeatedly earned national recognition annually from the Arbor Day Foundation for its tree pruning programs as a “Tree Line USA” utility. We have demonstrated excellence in tree care practices, annual worker training, a commitment to customer and public education as well as supporting community tree planting through “right tree–right place” guidance. We are among a select few utilities to earn this prestigious honor.

For information about our tree pruning programs, please select from the following:

- Safety around trees and electric wires
- Combat invasive tree-killing insects and help save the environment
- National Grid’s routine tree pruning responsibilities
- Homeowner tree pruning responsibilities
- Identifying your electric service
- Tree cleanup and wood disposal
- Digging in? Please call Dig Safely
- Planting trees? Plan ahead and choose plantings wisely
- Frequently asked questions
- Choose a qualified contractor

Safety around trees and electric wires.

When you’re enjoying the outdoors, remember to play it safe and avoid dangerous overhead electric lines. Children and adults should not climb, play or work in trees that are near electric wires.

For safety reasons, always treat all wires as high-voltage wires, energized and dangerous to touch, whether such wires are covered or bare, on the pole or fallen to the ground.

Important Note: During or after any storm event, consider all downed wires to be energized and dangerous, including telephone, fiber optic and cable TV wires. They may be in contact with energized electric wires that are not within your view. To report downed electric wires, please call 800-867-5222.
Combat invasive tree-killing insects and help save the environment.

Look for and report these symptoms:

**Emerald Ash Borer** – small “D” shaped exit holes on ash trees, tree death from the top down and “S”-shaped larval galleries under the bark.

**Asian Long-Horned Beetle** – 3/8 inch round exit holes (the diameter of a pencil) on the trunk and branches, sawdust and sap on and around the trees, round pits in the bark (egg niches), often on maples, horse chestnut, birch and willow trees.

To protect your property, only purchase firewood that has been harvested locally or heat treated to kill insect and disease pests. For more information and to report infestations: Visit [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov) or call 866-640-0652 (email: firewood@gw.dec.state.ny.us).

**National Grid’s routine tree pruning responsibilities and schedule.**

To ensure safety and electric service reliability, National Grid schedules tree pruning in your area every five to seven years adhering to the industry “best practices.”

National Grid utilizes a technique called “directional pruning” in order to naturally “train” and direct growth away from the wires. This method is a true benefit to the health of the tree as it reduces disease and decay entry points. We also make our pruning cuts at the branch bark ridge (not flush to the stem or limb), which helps promote proper wound closure. This pruning practice was developed in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service and is endorsed by the International Society of Arboriculture, the Arbor Day Foundation and other tree-care professionals around the world.

We only hire qualified, experienced line clearance tree contractors to do this work.

Working efficiently as possible, we schedule pruning by geographic location. Unless there is a significant tree hazard affecting the electric wires in your area, we do not perform tree pruning outside of our pruning schedule.

National Grid’s pruning is limited to tree branches that affect electric wires only. We do not prune trees or branches that affect individual customer service lines or phone and cable wires.

Before pruning, we attempt to notify metered customers by letter, door hanger or a National Grid contractor crew visit. National Grid prunes trees to maintain a minimum of 10-15 feet of clearance from our power lines.

The following illustrations provide examples of the proper directional pruning for shade and ornamental trees:

![Through Pruning](image1)
![Side Pruning](image2)
![Under Pruning](image3)

As part of our cyclic tree pruning process, crews will chip the branches they cut from the trees in your yard. Wood pieces that cannot be chipped will be cut into manageable lengths and left near the base of the tree.

In areas that are natural and not actively groomed or maintained, wood/brush may be cut (or mowed) and left to naturally decompose and contribute to wildlife habitat.

Often, customers need additional pruning beyond what National Grid provides as part of our scheduled work. National Grid does not prune other branches or remove trees that affect individual customer service lines. (See [Homeowner tree pruning responsibilities](#).)
Homeowner tree pruning responsibilities.

Often, customers need additional pruning beyond what National Grid performs. Working efficiently as possible, we schedule pruning by geographic location. Unless there is a significant tree hazard affecting the electric wires in your area, we do not perform tree pruning outside of our schedule. If additional pruning work beyond what we provide in our scheduled maintenance program is desired, you may hire an electrically qualified tree contractor (see Choosing a Contractor) to complete that work at your own expense. We will work closely with you and your qualified contractor if you require power turned off or other protective safety measures (see Understanding National Grid’s Responsibilities – Tree Removal Requests).

We appreciate your cooperating during our routine maintenance work. Property owners are sometimes hesitant to authorize tree pruning on their property. If a property owner does not permit us the ability to properly prune or remove trees, the property owner may be asked to sign a statement accepting responsibility and financial liability for any and all resulting damages and/or claims related to future electric service interruptions or damage caused by your tree(s).

**Important Note:** During or after any storm event, consider all downed wires to be energized and dangerous, including telephone, fiber optic and cable TV wires. They may be in contact with energized electric wires that are not within your view. To report downed electric wires, please call 800-867-5222.

Identifying your electric service.

How can you tell an electric line from a telephone or cable line? Here are a few important items you should know:

- High-voltage electric distribution lines are always at or near the top of the pole.
- These lines are usually found along neighborhood streets, but they may also be located in back yards, across open fields or wooded areas.
- If more than one utility line (telephone or cable) is mounted on the same pole, the high-voltage electric distribution lines will still be at the top of the pole.
- A low-voltage electric line is located several feet below the high-voltage line.
- The low-voltage line attaches to your service weatherhead (a protective device is located where the line is connected to your residence).
- The diagram below should also help you to identify electric lines.

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Tree cleanup and wood disposal.

As part of our routine, scheduled cyclic tree pruning, crews will chip the branches they remove from trees in your yard. Wood pieces that cannot be chipped will be cut into manageable lengths and left near the base of the tree.

In areas that are not actively maintained, wood/brush may be left to naturally decompose and provide shelter benefits for wildlife. In some areas where it’s possible, standing (or previously cut) brush may be mowed to facilitate faster decomposition. Paths and drainage ditches within the work area will be kept clear of cut brush or limbs.
Storm removal or cleanup
During a storm, our crews are focused on cutting and clearing trees from our lines to restore power as quickly and safely as possible. While we will remove broken utility poles and damaged electrical equipment, homeowners are responsible for removing all broken and/or damaged trees and limbs resulting from the storm, including those that National Grid removes from your trees to expedite service restoration.

Important Note: During or after any storm event, consider all downed wires to be energized and dangerous, including telephone, fiber optic and cable TV wires. They may be in contact with energized electric wires that are not within your view. To report downed electric wires, please call 800-867-5222.

Digging in? Please call Dig Safely.
Deciding where to plant a tree requires serious thought, because electric and gas utility lines may be underground and where you least expect them. Tall-growing trees planted under, near, or adjacent to utility lines may present a future hazard as they mature and eventually will require serious pruning and/or removal.

Call Dig Safely New York at 811 or 800-962-7962 at least two full working days before digging to plant or plan any excavation work. Dig Safely notifies National Grid and other participating utilities so that we can mark our underground wires, pipes or cables to prevent personal injury, property damage and service interruptions. To learn more, please go to www.digsafely.com.

Planting trees? Plan ahead and choose plantings wisely.
Please plant tall-growing trees away from utilities lines to protect you and your community. For information on selecting the right tree and planting near power lines, see How to Avoid Tree and Utility Line Conflicts at www.nationalgridus.com/environment.

Also, please remember not to plant tall growing trees or large, dense shrubs within 5 feet of any underground or above-ground electric distribution equipment. Their placement can interfere with equipment access or for needed maintenance or emergency repairs and may necessitate removal should circumstances warrant.

Important Note: Before planting, make sure to consider a tree’s full growth potential to see how the location of the tree will affect any overhead or underground utilities lines and rights-of-way.

We work closely with homeowners and their contractors to temporarily disconnect service for safe pruning or tree removal. Please call us at 800-642-4272 at least five days in advance of the work. By NYS law, there may be a charge to you or your contractor for such “make safe” procedures.

Proper Places for Trees Around Homes
Consult your arborist, nursery or landscape professional for help selecting the proper tree.

Trees that grow over 60 feet in height
Use large types of trees here, but plant them at least 35 feet away from the house.

Trees that grow no taller than 40 feet
This zone is used to decorate or frame your house. Select trees first, then plant shrubs to complement the trees.

Trees that grow less than 25 feet in height
This zone ends 25 feet away from electric utility wires.
Frequently asked questions.

Will National Grid prune or remove trees that are near the service drop to my home?

National Grid is responsible for routine pruning around our high voltage wires to maintain safe, reliable services to our customers.

Homeowners are responsible for pruning tree branches near the low voltage service drop to their individual home.

Many customers choose to remove these trees to reduce the risk that their tree may damage their home or electric service.

National Grid is available to work closely with your contractor to make the area safe for tree pruning or tree removal. In some cases, rubber sleeves can be placed over service wires. In other cases, it is necessary for us to temporarily disconnect your service lines from your home so that your contractor can safely prune or remove trees. By NYS law, there may be a charge to you or your contractor for such “make safe” procedures.

Your contractor damaged my property—who should I call?

Please call Customer Service at 800-642-4272 to report any damage.

National Grid did not prune around the wires that I was concerned about?

National Grid is responsible for only pruning around high voltage electric wires. Our forestry professionals assess each customer’s situation and will prune trees and branches that pose a risk to our high voltage electric distribution wires and overhead operations equipment. If a cycle prune for an area is scheduled, your pruning may occur at a later date. If the tree poses a risk to your individual service drop, your telephone or cable wires, please understand that National Grid is not responsible for pruning or removing those trees/branches.

National Grid disfigured my tree.

National Grid uses directional pruning in accordance with accepted national tree pruning standards to prevent trees from coming into contact with high voltage wires. We apologize that while the tree’s appearance may be compromised, the procedure promotes proper wound closure and is only conducted to preserve public safety and prevent power outages.

Choose a qualified contractor.

New York state law requires that all tree work in the proximity of overhead electric facilities should be completed by individuals trained to recognize the hazards of working near energized lines.

If you need tree work near overhead electric lines on your property, ask your contractor if his/her employees receive such training. If not, National Grid can arrange the needed services, and may charge you and/or your contractor for the service provided under NYS law.

Tree removals and pruning near service lines to your property should be done by an electric-qualified tree contractor and who employs workers specifically trained to work within 10 feet of electrical hazards.

If hazards to your service are present or you are planning to prune or remove trees near high-voltage wires, you may request that National Grid disconnect your service entrance wire temporarily from your home for your contractor.

Please contact Customer Service at 800-642-4272 at least five days in advance of the work. A forestry department representative will visit your property to assess the potential for any safety hazards or outage risks.