

Managing trees and your garden

Cornwall Rural Housing Association (CRHA) is a leading provider of good quality affordable rural homes across Cornwall and on the Isles of Scilly. CRHA recognise that effective management and maintenance of its 'green' space and trees is crucial to achieve this objective.

The purpose of this publication is to provide information to customers regarding tree planting and maintenance and our policy aims.

Our Approach

CRHA is responsible for effective maintenance of communal land it owns including trees and hedges. We carry out periodic maintenance work on communal areas on a scheduled basis, which includes formal inspection undertaken by a competent arboriculture contractor and informal inspections carried out by CRHA employees.

CRHA will consider carrying out tree and hedge maintenance works if confirmed by a competent contractor or officer if the tree is:

- Overhanging roads (below 5.2 meters), footpaths and/or signage
- Touching an adjacent structure or affecting the stability of a structure
- Diseased
- Structurally unsafe
- Preventing access
- Significantly damaged
- Potentially hazardous to health
- Dead
- Outgrown space allocated

Customer's Gardens and Trees

Our customers are responsible for the maintenance of their gardens, which includes lawns, hedges, shrubs and trees including keeping it clean and tidy. Trees in a resident's garden are not included in CRHA's planned inspection and maintenance regime.

Upon letting a property CRHA will ensure that the garden is let on a manageable basis. Any grass cutting, hedge, shrub or tree maintenance is carried out whilst the property is void. When the property has been re-let the garden areas then become a condition of the tenancy agreement that the tenant/s accept.

CRHA appreciates, however, that it may not always be possible or safe for customers to satisfactorily maintain trees and large shrubs, especially those which may be well-established, that are within the curtilage of their properties. In exceptional circumstances, we may help a resident manage trees that are dead, diseased or dangerous or causing

damage to property. We will also assist our customers who are vulnerable, disabled and/or elderly. The customer may be recharged for this service.

Garden Alterations

CRHA encourages its customers to make changes to their garden environment as it can breathe new life into using outdoor space, making it more enjoyable and functional.

Any alterations that change the landscape or potentially can have an impact on the property must first be discussed with us and conditional permission will be given i.e. extending patio areas, erecting sheds, installing garden ponds etc. and this is the same for planting trees. Any trees that are planted become the responsibility of our customer and a condition of the permission given is that they are regularly maintained.

About Trees

From the beginning of time, trees have provided two of the natural world's most essential resources – oxygen and food. Over a millennia trees are continuing to provide a vast amount of benefits, some of which are still being discovered today.

It's has never been more critical that rainforests, woodlands, hedgerows and trees in urban settings and the wider landscape, are preserved and sustainably managed across the world.

The benefits of trees and woodlands is massive, and well documented. However, much of the time, trees are undervalued and to some, a nuisance. Trees and their values should be highly respected for those benefits they provide.

Benefits

All greenspace benefits our health and well-being and it is suggested that being able to view trees can help to reduce stress and mental fatigue. There is a strong connection between people's health and happiness and the presence of accessible, green, safe and pleasant areas.

The planting of trees can be beneficial to our health and wellbeing by absorbing carbon dioxide and creating oxygen. As well as providing oxygen, trees also clean and improve air quality, especially car exhaust fumes, for us to breathe by removing dust and reducing and absorbing other pollutants like carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide. These particulates are then washed from the trees into the ground every time it rains, and/or falls to the ground with the flaking bark as the bark detaches from the tree through natural processes.

Over the last few years the UK has witnessed some severe storms that has caused devastating flooding to large areas. Trees reduce run off by intercepting rainfall thus allowing the water to flow down the tree and into the ground. It is suggested that trees can reduce the risk of flooding by up to 20 percent.

Trees create a peaceful, aesthetically pleasing environment that increases our quality of life by bringing natural elements and wildlife habitats into urban settings. They provide shade and in particular valuable habitat for wildlife (birds, bats, insects).

Downside

Planting the wrong tree in the wrong place can cause various issues. The following is how impactful the wrong tree in the wrong place can be:-

- Blocking out the sun, which can cause problems for other plants that need sunlight to grow.
- Dropping leaves and branches, which can be a nuisance.
- Attracting pests like insects and animals, which can be a problem for people who live nearby.
- Being difficult and costly to maintain, especially after storms.
- Blocking roads needed for emergency access.
- Obstructing utility cables and being the cause of electrical outages.
- Being messy.
- Being weak and prone to damage.

Handy Tips – Considering purchasing a tree?

Before buying a tree, always check its eventual height and spread, check that it will thrive in your chosen planting site, how well it responds to pruning and make sure it won't outgrow its space.

The best time to plant is from autumn to spring, as long as the ground isn't too wet or frozen. Containerised trees can be planted at other times, but they may need more aftercare to help them settle in. Avoid planting in hot or dry weather.

Ensure you plant the tree correctly:-

- Find appropriate position and ensure that it won't impact any boundary fencing or outbuildings in the future.
- Dig a hole deep and big enough.
- Soak the rootball beforehand.
- Loosen the roots if tightly packed to encourage them to grow outwards in the soil.
- Once planted add a tree guard or spiral around the base of the trunk to protect from wildlife.
- Water well and spread mulch over the surface of the soil.
- Insert a sturdy stake at a 45 degree angle making sure it is deeply anchored.
- Attach a flexible tree tie.

Aftercare and Regular Inspections

The frequency of tree maintenance depends on various factors, including the type of tree, its age, health, and location. Here are some general guidelines:

1. The UK Government recommends a minimum of 5 years between professional tree inspections. Regular inspections help identify any issues early and ensure the tree's safety.
2. If you notice an obvious issue with your tree, such as signs of disease, damage or instability, contact an arboriculture consultant as soon as possible. Prompt action can prevent further problems.
3. As a tree owner, you have a duty of care to ensure your tree/s are safe. Regular inspections by a competent arboriculturist are sensible.

4. If you suspect a dangerous tree on neighbouring land, politely express your concerns to the owner and recommend an inspection as soon as possible by an arboriculturist.
5. If you are being impacted by overhanging trees and roots discuss your concerns with the tree owner beforehand, but you have the right to manage overhanging branches and encroaching roots (common law).

Advice

Do your research and make sure the tree is appropriate and manageable.

Remember that specific situations may vary. If in doubt, consult a professional arborist to determine the best course of action for your specific tree.

Make sure you maintain it! Regular pruning is essential and should be carried out by a qualified person.

Don't watch it grow out of control. With the right maintenance a tree can give you many benefits, however, it can also be a safety risk, an annoyance and a nuisance.

If any of our customers have concerns about trees in their gardens or on communal land please contact our Property Services team on 01208 892000 for help and advice.

General Handy Gardening Tips

Numerous studies show that gardening is good for both the body and the mind. So good in fact that some GPs have even started writing prescriptions for gardening! The benefits can be as varied as reduced stress to increased fitness and improved vitamin D levels.

It is important to design your garden so that it fits in with your lifestyle and you have enough time to manage it.

Choosing plants and shrubs that like the conditions in your garden is a big step towards successful growing. Choosing perennial, annual or seasonal plants are all preferences. Plants usually, the most colourful, can attract wildlife to your garden and are easy and rewarding (bees and butterflies). Perennials generally live for more than two years and include trees, shrubs, flowering plants and vegetative ground covers. They typically die back in hard frosts and emerge with new growth in spring, and some retain foliage all year round. These can be ideal for gardeners that have limited time and resource.

Soil, also commonly referred to as earth or dirt, is a mixture of organic matter, minerals, gases, liquids, and organisms that together support the life of plants and soil organisms. It is so important to ensure your soil provides the essential nutrients to enable your plants and shrubs to grow. Knowledge is power in gardening. Determining your soil composition can establish whether your garden space, is sandy, clay, or silt – even degrading compost. You find out what your soil makeup is using a mason jar “test” and then you can adjust as necessary.

Prior to planting it is good to prepare your soil by digging the soil thoroughly, breaking up large clods or lumps to relieve compaction, remove any weeds, debris and compaction. It is beneficial to add organic matter to the soil and this could be home-made garden compost, bagged compost or well-rotted manure mixing it well into the soil. Ensure that you dig a hole big enough to accommodate the plant or shrub (allowing for growth) then cover the hole with the soil making sure it is firm and level. The final action is to water the plant/shrub and

continue to regularly water as the plant grows. Using a water can is better than a straight hose especially with young shoots.

Vermin/Pests

As a rural housing provider our homes are situated in the countryside and wildlife is more prevalent.

Mice and rats are unwelcome visitors to our gardens and generally considered vermin which can spread potentially serious diseases and they are generally nocturnal so you may not see them. They can set up home beneath decking, in sheds or greenhouses and compost heaps and a good food source is bird feeders. You may notice 'runs' (tracks alongside walls, fencing or buildings up to 10cm wide and you may also notice cylindrical droppings, gnawed wood or parallel teeth marks in crops.

Rats and mice can wreak havoc within your home, causing structural damage that extends beyond mere inconvenience. Their incessant gnawing can lead to compromised insulation, chewed electrical wires that can be a fire hazard, chewed water lines that can cause flooding and water damage, and even components like woodwork and pipes.

Bees are vital to the environment as they are perfectly adapted to pollinate, helping plants grow, breed and produce food by transferring pollen between flowering plants, therefore, keeping the cycle of life turning. However, a bee's nest can pose a threat to you, your family and pets, especially for those allergic. Bees will start to make an appearance in the spring and summer. Bees are furrer than wasps and have thicker looking bodies and can only sting once before they die. A bee infestation can last as long as seven months if left untreated, therefore, it is important to get in touch with a local bee removal contractor as soon as you notice signs of one forming.

Wasps appear in the summer months and are known for their ability to nest in a variety of places. A nest could be high up in the trees, in your chimney, wall cavity, underground or outside your property. Wasps are known to be more aggressive than bees and they can sting as many times as they like. If you discover a wasp nest, please contact a certified pest contractor as wasps can cause significant damage to a property if left.

It is important to be vigilant and put controls in place if you suspect that you have vermin or pests in the garden as it can quickly escalate and put your property at risk if they enter your home. Please call our Property Services team on 01208 892000 immediately so that we can make arrangements for our pest control contractors to attend your home to remove them.

Good hygiene, keeping rubbish and food waste securely contained and blocking off their access route are simple measures you can take to reduce the chance of being overrun by vermin.

If you like to feed the birds monitor the amount of food, you put in your feeders. If the food is consumed quickly reduce the amount of food you are offering. Use a bird table or hanging feeders as opposed to using ground feeding trays as rats/mice will have easier access to it. Ensure that any debris and excess bird feed that has fallen on the floor is swept away daily.

If you do have vermin, this can be treated from using products available from pet shops and DIY stores but care should be taken when using them. Please note that any poisons should only be used by a qualified pest control officer.

CRHA will deal with reports of pest and insects including vermin in accordance with the Tenancy Agreement. If such reports are made, CRHA may investigate the issue and advise the customer to report the infestations to the relevant local authority's Environmental Health & Safety team, where applicable.