

[The following article is a submission from a resident, and does not necessarily represent the opinions of the PCA]

Trees, by Maria Pedak-Kari

Tall and strong. Old and stately. Green, then red, yellow, orange and even purple. Trees present one of the joys of living in the Plantations Community (406 households strong). They support our air quality, our sense of beauty, and our place in the natural scheme of things. Like everything else in life, they too need care.

What can we do for our leafy friends? One easy step is to cut off vines that strangle trees. English Ivy, poison ivy, and a host of other invasive vines like climbing. Take clippers and cut a section out at your own height all around the tree. Clear the ground growth but leave the higher vines alone. Pulling at them could topple the tree. They will wither and fall off.

Did you know that the trees planted along and close to our streets belong to Montgomery County? These grassy areas are right of way land. Only County Government employees are responsible for pruning, removing or replacing trees on this property. These are busy people. The County has over 500,000 street trees!

Tree maintenance is handled by a very small office in the Highway Services Division of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (DOT). Three arborists try valiantly to keep up with planting, pruning, replacing, and removing County trees. Last fall, the office was getting 30 calls a day. The backlog of calls can lead to waits of three to six months.

How does a homeowner navigate this County service? DOT has a call center staffed by humans (as opposed to voice robots). Call 240-777-6000 and present your request. You will be asked for basic information that the person will then forward to the Tree Maintenance Database where it will be assigned to an arborist for a site visit. Be sure to describe anything that is urgent (broken limb about to fall onto road, etc.) These folks have divided the County into 30 areas and go through it methodically. We are area #27.

There is another approach. Our PCA could formally request a block pruning. The County arborist would come out and look at all our trees. This request would be stronger if it includes a list of problem trees. Since I am a latent tree hugger, I would be glad to join someone in assessing our trees to support such a request. This, of course, all requires official PCA action.

Trees in our yards are our responsibility. Recent winds made me take a closer look at those near my house and cars. Pruning, shaping, removing damaged branches and controlling growth that is too near a house are all in the domain of professional arborists. Coupons have flooded my mailbox and probably yours. Having gone through this several years ago, I can assure readers that cost is not the only criterion. It is more important than ever to ask for references (with phone numbers), check that licenses and insurance are up-to-date (any company should be able to show these to you) and call the County Consumer Protection Office (240-777-3636) to see if any complaints have been lodged against the company. The Better Business Bureau for our area can be reached through 202-393-6000. In this economy, scams would be even harder to take.

Of course, the “I’ll do this myself person” can buy or borrow tree sheers and go to work. Just be sure to move your cars out of the way of potential flying branches and wear eye protection.

The Montgomery County staff members who I spoke to in the Office of Tree Maintenance were all knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and caring. They answered my questions thoughtfully. I learned a lot. Trees are such a source of beauty and health in our Plantations community. I hope we all take good care of them just as we take care of our neighbors.

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