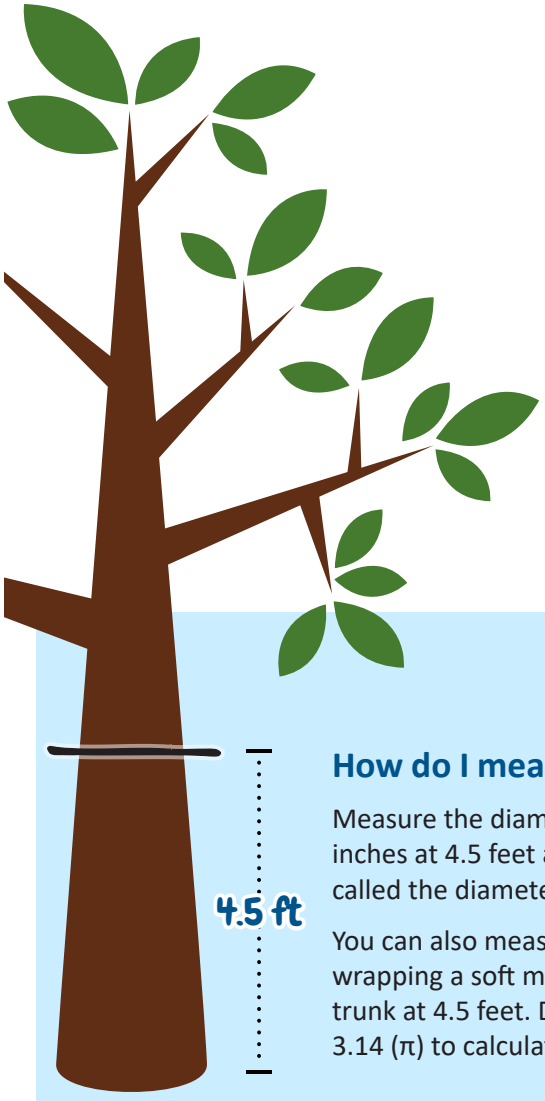
RESIDENTIAL TREE REMOVAL & REPLACEMENT

The protection of trees on private properties in Burien is important for many reasons. Studies show that trees help clean air, reduce the effects of global climate change, reduce stress, increase economic activity, increase property values, and make our community more attractive.

See **BMC 19.26**.



Do I need a permit to remove a tree from my property?

New regulations to protect trees on private property in Burien went into effect on October 12, 2022. The revised regulations require private property owners to secure a tree permit before:

- Removing exceptional trees, defined as a tree that is large for its species.
- Removing more than one tree per year (more trees may be removed if lot is greater than 5,000 ft^2).
- When tree removal results in a lot below the required tree credit density, which is based on lot size. The larger the lot, the more trees must be preserved or replanted.
- Topping trees.
- Pruning more than 25% of a tree's canopy.

A permit is not required for:

- Removal of small trees that are not considered "significant" (trees below 6 inches in diameter at 4.5 feet above the ground).
- Normal and routine maintenance where less than 25% of the live foliage is removed, and no tree topping occurs.
- Emergency work where the tree poses a high risk to surrounding targets. However, a retroactive permit is required in this situation.
- Pruning a hedge.

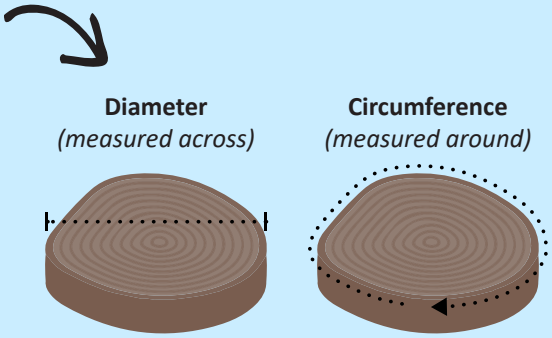
Separate code sections regulate **shorelines**, **critical areas** (stream, wetlands, and landslide hazard areas), and public property. All trees in shorelines, critical areas and their buffers, and public property require permits for removal, no matter their size.

See also the Tree Permit Flow Chart.

How do I measure an existing tree?

Measure the diameter of the tree trunk in inches at 4.5 feet above the ground. This is called the diameter at standard height (DSH).

You can also measure the circumference by wrapping a soft measuring tape around the trunk at 4.5 feet. Divide the circumference by 3.14 (π) to calculate DSH.



400 SW 152nd St., Suite 300, Burien, WA 98166
Phone (206) 241-4647 • Fax (206) 248-5539 • burienwa.gov

What type of tree permit do I need?

Activity	Minor Tree Removal Permit	Major Tree Removal Permit	Vegetation Management Plan	Tree Pruning Permit	Public Works Right-Of-Way (ROW) Permit	No Permit
Private Property Not Associated with Development						
Removal of significant tree(s) on private property pursuant to Table 19.26.060-1 or removal of non-significant trees.						✓
Removal of trees that result in a lot below the minimum tree credits.	✓					
Removal of significant trees beyond the allowed removal pursuant to Table 19.26.060-1.	✓					
Removal of exceptional trees.	✓					
Removal of tree(s) in a shoreline management area, critical area, or buffer.			✓			
Removal or pruning of MORE than 25% of the live canopy of a tree(s) in a shoreline management area, critical area, or buffer.			✓			
Removal or pruning of LESS than 25% of the live canopy of a tree(s) in a shoreline management area, critical area, or buffer.				✓		
Private Property Associated with Development						
Any tree removal		✓				
Public Works and ROW: Removal/planting/pruning of tree(s) in public right-of-way						
No critical area					✓	
Critical area			✓ or	✓	and ✓	

Page 3 summarizes the five permit types in more detail.

What type of tree permit do I need?

Note: All vegetation (including trees) is regulated in critical areas, shoreline management areas, and ROWs.

Minor Tree Removal Permit

Required in residential areas (outside of critical areas and shorelines) in the following situations:

1. Significant tree removal in excess of the allowed limits below (Table 19.26.060-1):

Property Size	Max. allowance for significant tree removals per 12 mo.
Under 5,000 ft²	1
5,000–10,000 ft²	2
10,001–20,000 ft²	4
20,001 ft² or more	5

Note: If the property is below the required minimum tree credits, trees cannot be removed without a minor tree removal permit.

2. Removal of an exceptional tree.
3. Removal of trees that would result in a lot going below the required minimum tree credits. See the Tree Credits Fact Sheet.

Major Tree Removal Permit

Required when proposing to remove significant or exceptional trees on undeveloped lots or when development is proposed.

Vegetation Management Plan

Required for properties located in a shoreline management area, critical area, or buffer where vegetation is proposed to be disturbed, including removal of a tree or removal or pruning of MORE than 25% of the live canopy of a tree. Critical areas subject to vegetation management plan review include geologically hazardous areas, frequently flooded areas, wetlands, and streams.

Tree Pruning Permit

Required for removal or pruning of LESS than 25% of the live canopy of a tree in a shoreline management area, critical area, or buffer. Critical areas subject to tree pruning permit review include geologically hazardous areas, frequently flooded areas, wetlands, and streams.

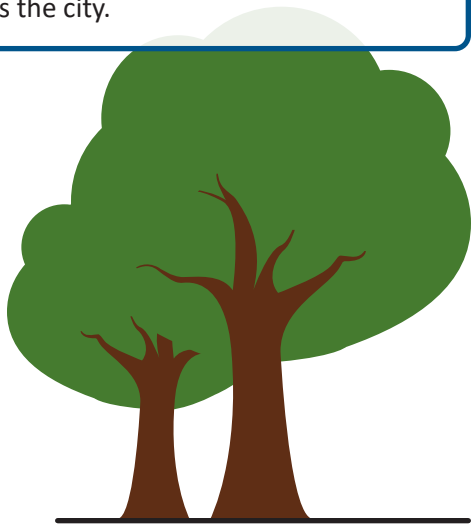
Right-of-way (ROW) Permit

Required for tree removal, pruning, or planting in the public ROW. This is typically the area extending from the street to the back edge of the sidewalk, although it can vary across the city.

When is tree replacement required?

Tree replacement is required when removing trees in critical areas and their buffers, shorelines, and in the right-of-way. Tree replacement is also required when going below the required minimum tree credits (Table 19.26.050-1), removing healthy significant trees beyond the allowances in Table 19.26.060-1, and during development (see the Development Tree Protection, Removal, and Replacement Fact Sheet).

Tree replacement helps to slow the loss of trees across Burien and reach our goal of 40% canopy cover by 2038.



400 SW 152nd St., Suite 300, Burien, WA 98166
Phone (206) 241-4647 • Fax (206) 248-5539 • burienwa.gov

Minimum Tree Credit Density

All pieces of property, regardless of zoning or use, within the City of Burien are required to maintain a minimum tree credit density (BMC 19.26.050). The tree credit requirement is calculated by land use type as shown below (Table 19.26.050-1).

Developable area excludes critical areas and their buffers, public rights-of-way, private PUD streets, shared driveways, and public trails.



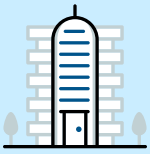
Single-family (detached dwellings, ADUs, and DADUs) and townhouses on individual lots.

1.0 Required minimum tree credits per 1,000 ft² of developable area.



Multi-family (attached dwellings including townhouse apartments and cottage housing).

1.0 Required minimum tree credits per 1,000 ft² of developable area.



Commercial, industrial, or landscape categories C, D, and F.

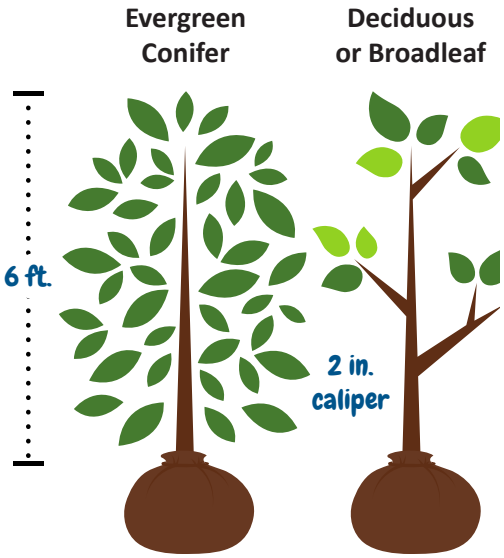
0.15 Required minimum tree credits per 1,000 ft² of developable area.

Tree Credit Chart

Credits are derived from the size of a tree (Table 19.26.050-2). See the Residential Tree Removal & Replacement Fact Sheet for how to measure DSH.

Existing Significant and Exceptional Trees							
Tree Diameter at Standard Height (DSH)	≥6 & ≤10 in.	>10 & ≤14 in.	>14 & ≤18 in.	>18 & ≤22 in.	>22 & ≤26 in.	>26 & <30 in.	≥30 in. & all exceptional trees
Credits Per Tree	1	2	3	4	5	7	9

Planted Trees		
Tree Size	6-ft. tall evergreen conifer	2-in. caliper deciduous or broadleaf tree
Credits Per Tree	2	1



How do I calculate minimum tree credit density?

Minimum tree credit density is based on the type of development and the amount of developable area.

When this calculation does not result in a whole number the number is rounded to the nearest whole number (in this case 7).

Example:

A single family residential property has **7,200 ft²** of developable area (i.e., excludes land within critical areas and their buffers, public ROWs, private streets, shared driveways, and public trails).

$$\frac{7{,}200\ ft^2}{1{,}000\ ft^2} = 7.2 \text{ minimum tree credits} \Rightarrow \textbf{7 minimum tree credits}$$

Scenario A

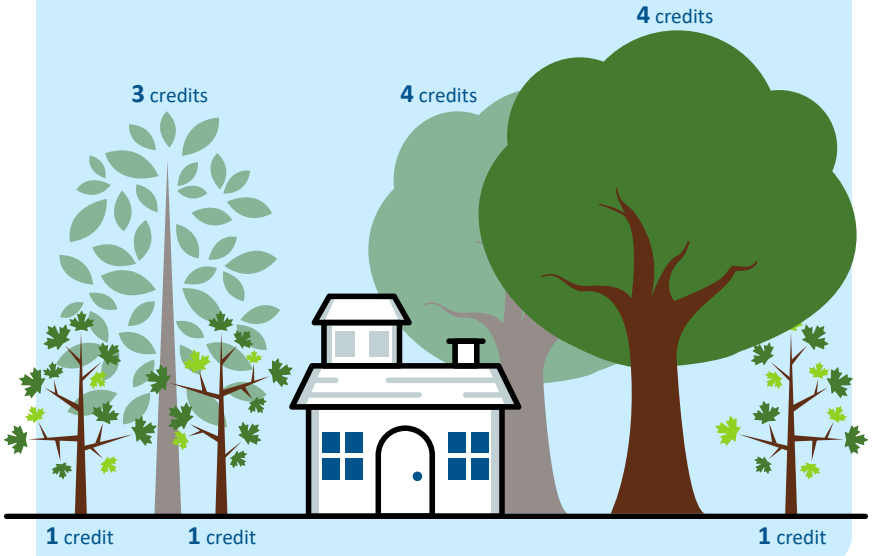
There are two 20-inch Douglas-fir trees, one 15-inch red oak, and three 6-inch bigleaf maples currently on the property.

20-inch Douglas-fir = **4** tree credits x **2** trees = **8** tree credits

15-inch Red Oak = **3** tree credits x **1** tree = **3** tree credits

6-inch Bigleaf Maple = **1** tree credit x **3** trees = **3** tree credits

Total tree credits on site: **8 + 3 + 3 = 14 tree credits**.
Minimum required tree credits are met and exceeded.



Scenario B

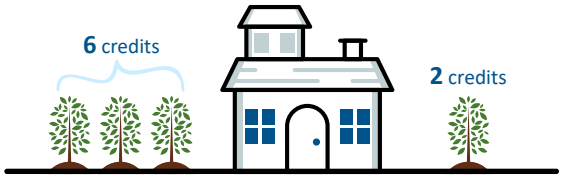
If the same property had no trees on the site it would need to plant trees to reach the required 7 tree credits. Each 2-inch caliper deciduous or broadleaf tree counts for 1 tree credit. Each 6-foot-tall evergreen conifer planted counts as 2 tree credits

The minimum required credits can be reached by planting seven deciduous trees or four evergreen coniferous trees, or some combination of the two.

Seven new deciduous trees



Four new evergreen coniferous trees



Combination of new deciduous & evergreen trees



400 SW 152nd St., Suite 300, Burien, WA 98166
Phone (206) 241-4647 • Fax (206) 248-5539 • burienwa.gov

Tree
BMC 19.10.545.1

A woody plant, that has one or several dominant trunks, each with a diameter at standard height of 3 inches or greater, that reaches a mature height greater than 15 feet.

Exceptional Tree. Any tree 30 inches diameter at standard height, any tree identified in **Table 19.26.040-1**, or a tree designated as a **Heritage Tree**.

Hazard Tree. A hazard tree is a tree that meets all the following criteria:

- A tree with a combination of structural defects and/or disease which makes it subject to a high probability of failure;
- Is in proximity to moderate to high frequency targets (persons or property that can be damaged by tree failure);
- The assessed tree has a high to extreme risk rating using the International Society of Arborists Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) method in its most current form; and
- The hazard condition of the tree cannot be lessened with reasonable and proper arboricultural practices, nor can the target be removed or restricted.

Healthy Tree. A tree with less than 25% crown decline and dieback of the canopy, with normal leaf development, although minor deficiencies might be present. Minor pest problems might be present, but controllable. Minor trunk or branch defects might be present, but with good response wood or wound closure.

Significant Tree. An existing healthy tree which, when measured at the diameter at standard height, has a minimum diameter of 6 inches and is not an exceptional tree. Hedges made of Leyland cypress (Cuprocyparis leylandii), arborvitae (Thuja occidentalis), laurel (Prunus lusitanica and Prunus laurocerasus), or holly (Ilex aquifolium) are not considered to be significant trees and may be trimmed or removed. Any tree on the prohibited plants and trees list (**BMC 19.10.408**) is not considered a significant tree.

Diameter at Standard Height (DSH)
BMC 19.10.341

Diameter at standard height (DSH) is the diameter of a tree trunk measured at 4.5 feet above average grade and is used in determining the diameter of existing trees.

Where a tree has a branch(es) or swelling that interferes with the measurement at 4.5 feet above average grade or where a tree tapers below this point, the diameter is measured at the narrowest point below 4.5 feet.

For trees located on a slope, the 4.5 feet is measured from the average of the highest and lowest ground points or, on very steep slopes where this is not possible, the lowest practical point on the uphill side.

Where a tree splits into several trunks close to ground level, the DSH for the tree is the square root of the sum of the DSH for each individual stem squared. For example, with 3 stems:

$$DSH = \sqrt{(stem1)^2 + (stem2)^2 + (stem3)^2}$$

Tree Pruning
BMC 19.10.545.3

The intentional removal of a tree's branches in order to reduce the live canopy of the tree by no more than 25% during any consecutive 12 months, in accordance with the current version of ANSI A300 Part 1. Pruning Specifications. Trimming more than 25% of a tree's canopy during any consecutive 12 months shall be considered tree removal.

Tree Topping
BMC 19.10.545.4

The act of removing whole tops of trees, or indiscriminate removal of large branches and/or trunks from the tops of trees and leaving stubs or lateral branches that result in the disfigurement of the canopy and compromises the health and structure of the tree. Tree topping is considered to be tree removal.