



City of Charlottesville: Trees and landscaping guide

1. Permits & Coverage

Before you dig or chop, know these two core requirements:

- The 8-Inch Rule: You must obtain a Tree Removal Permit before removing any tree with a diameter of 8 inches or more (measured at breast height, or DBH).
- The Canopy Target: Every project must meet a minimum Tree Canopy Cover percentage based on the lot's zoning, calculated for 10 years after planting.

Required Canopy Cover by Zone

District Type	Examples	Min. Canopy Cover
Residential	All R- districts	20%
Mixed Use / Downtown	RX, CX, NX, DX	10%
Industrial	All IX- districts	10%
Special	Special districts	15%

2. Preservation: Keep What You Have

Preserving existing trees is often more cost-effective than planting new ones. The city offers bonuses for keeping healthy, mature trees.

- 1.5x Bonus: If you preserve an 8" DBH tree, it counts as 1.5 times the area of its actual dripline toward your canopy requirement.
- Specimen Bonus: Exceptional trees (historic, aged, or massive) can count as up to 4 trees toward screening requirements.
- What to Protect: You must make reasonable efforts to save:
 - Trees 8" DBH or larger.
 - Ornamental trees of any size.
 - Trees in setbacks or along boundaries.

- Natural features like streams.

Note: To get credit for preserved trees, you must submit a Tree Protection Plan showing how you will keep them safe during construction (fencing, root protection, etc.).

3. Planting Standards for Developers

If you are adding new greenery, follow these Living Standards to ensure the project is approved:

Selection & Diversity

- Master Tree List: Use the City's approved list. Avoid prohibited species (invasive or structurally weak).
- Diversity: If planting more than 5 plants, no more than 50% can be the same species.
- Resilience: Plants must be locally hardy and able to survive on natural rainfall once established.

Installation Specs

- Soil Volume: Trees must have enough soil room to grow to maturity. If the soil volume is too small, the tree won't count toward your canopy requirement.
- Power Lines: Only trees that stay under 20 feet tall at maturity can be planted under overhead utilities.
- Protection: New planting areas must be protected from cars via curbing or approved barriers.

4. Maintenance & Money (Bonding)

The City ensures landscaping survives through financial guarantees.

- Performance Bond: Before getting a Certificate of Occupancy (CO), you must either install the landscaping or post a bond for 100% of the value (plants + labor).
- Maintenance Bond: Once trees are planted, a bond for 1/3 of the value is held for 12 months. If the trees are healthy after one year, the bond is released.
- Ongoing Care: After the bond is released, the property owner (or HOA) is legally responsible for keeping the plants healthy and weed-free forever.

Developer Checklist

- Measured DBH of all existing trees?
- Applied for Tree Removal Permit (for trees >8")?
- Calculated Canopy % based on Zoning District?
- Created a Tree Protection Plan for construction?
- Checked the Master Tree List for approved species?
- Verified soil volumes and utility line clearances?
- Prepared Performance/Maintenance Bonds?