

Trees and power lines

Planting a tree that genetically is designed to grow to sixty feet in height underneath a power line that is twenty feet off the ground does not make sense to me. But you see the end result of this mismatch in virtually any town or city. In some cases, I've wondered if the person planting the trees used the power line as a reference to plant the trees in a straight row.

Utility right-of-ways are a tempting place to plant trees because they are usually open and clear. But please resist that temptation unless you've done your homework.

In today's article, Theresa Friday, UF/IFAS Extension Agent in Santa Rosa County, Dr. Ed. Gilman, Professor of Environmental Horticulture with the University of Florida and I provide the following on correctly planting trees in association with utility lines.

Small, immature trees planted today can grow into problem trees in the future. Electric utilities prune trees to ensure safe, reliable service to customers and to gain access to utility structures. The practice is referred to as line clearance. Homeowners, horticulturists and other persons without Electrical Hazard Awareness training must leave this to a line clearance tree trimmer. Call the utility company or a utility arborist to do this hazardous work.

Planting "small" maturing trees (those that remain small even when mature) near power lines reduces pruning needs. Selecting the right tree and planting it in the right place around power lines can eliminate potential safety hazards and improve the reliability of your electric service. In addition, your tree can achieve the proper height and form desired.

University of Florida researchers have developed a list of small trees that are better suited for planting below power lines. This list is now available at <http://treesandpowerlines.ifas.ufl.edu>. When using this website, make sure to click on the Northwest Florida region.

Some of the recommended trees include: redbud, Chinese fringetree, crape myrtle, ligustrum, wax myrtle, loquat, sweet olive, chickasaw plum and Savannah holly.

These recommendations are based on the research co-sponsored by the Florida Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry and conducted by Ed Gilman. More than 70 small trees were thought to be compatible with urban structures such as overhead power lines, streetlights and sidewalks.

The research was spurred in part by legislation enacted in 2007 (Statute 163.3209) that limits the mature height of trees that municipalities can recommend for planting beneath power lines.

Homeowners, property management companies, municipalities and utility companies can benefit from the website by taking steps to recommend and plant the right trees under power lines minimizing the need for pruning and the chances of tree limbs causing power outages.

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