



CLIENT HANDOUT · TREES

Before You Remove (or Prune) a Tree

Got a tree that has to go? Hold the chainsaw. On the North Shore, most decent-sized trees on private land need council approval before they're removed or heavily pruned. Yes, even many non-native ones. Check first: the penalties are serious.

What your council says

Short summaries as at October 2026. Rules and fees change, so always check the council page or call before any work.

Ku-ring-gai

A tree is protected if it is **5 m or taller**, or its trunk is **150 mm or more across at ground level**. Native or not, it counts. There are no exemptions on heritage items, in heritage conservation areas, in threatened ecological communities (rare, protected types of bushland) or for threatened species. Even a dead tree needs written confirmation from council before it comes down.

krg.nsw.gov.au › Environment › Trees › Trees on your property

Lane Cove

You generally need a permit if **any one** of these is true: the tree is **over 4 m tall**; its canopy spreads over 5 m; its trunk is over 150 mm across at 1 m above ground; or you want to cut roots 40 mm or thicker. Some species are on a fee-free permit list. Trees in an endangered ecological community go to council's Native Vegetation Panel. Heritage items may need a development application (DA). Phone 02 9911 3555.

lanecove.nsw.gov.au › Environment & Sustainability › Tree Management › Trees on Your Property

Hornsby

Hornsby's rules, and its list of trees that don't need approval, are in its Development Control Plan (recently updated). The easy way: answer a few questions in council's online **Tree prune/removal decision tool**.

hornsby.nsw.gov.au/Environment/Flora-and-fauna/Trees/Trees-on-private-property/Tree-prune-removal-decision-tool

Willoughby

Check council's "Trees on your property" page for current size thresholds and the application form.

willoughby.nsw.gov.au/Residents/Trees/Trees-on-your-property

Another council (e.g. North Sydney, Mosman)? Search "[council] tree permit" or give them a call. **Street trees belong to council**: never prune or remove them yourself.

MYTH: "It's my tree, on my land. I can cut it down."

FACT: Not on the North Shore. Most decent-sized trees on private land need council approval first, natives and exotics alike.

Five steps before any tree work

- 1 **Name it and measure it:** the height, and how thick the trunk is at the height your council uses.
- 2 **Check your council's rules** (left), plus any heritage listing or bushland zoning on your property.
- 3 **Look for wildlife:** nests, tree hollows and sleeping animals.
- 4 **Get expert advice** from a consulting arborist (AQF Level 5) if the tree is big, close to the house, or council asks for a report.
- 5 **Get approval in writing**, then use a qualified, insured tree contractor. Keep the paperwork.

Wildlife lives here

Native birds, possums, bats and other native animals are protected in NSW, and so are nests that are being used. Tree hollows take many decades to form, so they can't be replaced in a hurry. Check before pruning, especially in spring, and get advice if animals are living there.

Near bushland? The 10/50 rule

Some properties near bushland are in a "10/50 area". There, the NSW RFS 10/50 Code may let you clear some vegetation without council approval. But there are conditions and exceptions. Check your address with the RFS online tool **on the day**, and read the Code before you do anything.

Neighbour's tree a problem?

Have a chat over the fence first. A free mediation through Community Justice Centres can help. If a neighbour's tree has caused (or is likely to cause) damage or injury, or a tall hedge blocks your sun or views, the **Land and Environment Court** can make orders under the *Trees (Disputes Between Neighbours) Act 2006*.

Sources: Ku-ring-gai Council and Lane Cove Council "Trees on your property" pages (checked Oct 2026); Hornsby Council tree decision tool; Willoughby Council trees page; NSW RFS 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code; Trees (Disputes Between Neighbours) Act 2006 (NSW); NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016; AS 4373 Pruning of amenity trees; PlantNET.

Keep it, fix it, or replace it?

Before you decide to remove

- ✓ **Is it really a problem?** Falling leaves, shade or a few roots at the surface can often be managed without taking the tree out. Ask your council how it sees these.
- ✓ **Could pruning fix it?** Pruning by a qualified arborist (to the Australian Standard for pruning, AS 4373) is often an option. Heavy pruning can need approval too.
- ✓ **Is it a local native?** A big old local tree feeds and shelters far more wildlife than anything you could plant in the next ten years.
- ✓ **Is it a weed?** Some councils make it easier to remove listed weed trees such as privet, camphor laurel and African olive. Check your council's list.

Who does what

Consulting arborist (AQF Level 5)	The tree "doctor": checks health and risk, and writes reports for council.
Tree contractor / arborist (AQF Level 3)	Does the pruning or removal, once it's approved.
Council	Decides applications for trees on private land; manages street trees.
RF Horticulture	Garden care, small-shrub pruning, weed control and replanting. Not tree removal or arborist reports.

Don't do it yourself

Removing or damaging a tree without approval can lead to fines. That includes damaging roots and "topping" (lopping the top off). Climbing and chainsaw work belong with qualified, insured contractors.

Measuring trunk diameter

Grab a tape measure. Wrap it around the trunk at the height your council uses (ground level in Ku-ring-gai, 1 m up in Lane Cove), then divide by 3.14. **Quick tip:** a trunk 150 mm across is about **47 cm around**. More than one trunk? Ask council how they measure it.

✓ Do this

- Check council rules first
- Look for nests and hollows
- Keep the approval in writing

✗ Not that

- Touch street trees
- "Top" a tree
- Cut big roots without checking

Replanting? Pick the right size

If removal is approved, councils often ask for a replacement tree. In small North Shore gardens, local small trees and tall shrubs work well:



Photo: T. Hammer, CC BY (iNaturalist)

Blueberry ash
Elaeocarpus reticulatus
Full sun to part shade
Shrub or small tree; fringed bell flowers, blue fruit for birds.



Photo: Petra Holland, CC BY (iNaturalist)

NSW Christmas bush
Ceratopetalum gummiferum
Full sun to part shade
Tall shrub or small tree; turns red at Christmas (the red bits are really sepals, not petals).



Photo: Bryce Watts-Parker, CC BY (iNaturalist)

Grey myrtle
Backhousia myrtifolia
Part shade to shade
Shrub or small tree for part shade.

Descriptions from PlantNET; garden plants usually stay smaller than wild trees. Keep new trees well clear of the house, pipes and power lines.

Tree sorted? Let's fix the gap.

I do replanting, garden care and small-shrub pruning, and I'll tell you which trees probably need council approval. For tree assessments I refer you to an independent consulting arborist (AQF Level 5).

Get in touch for a quote: 0481 106 188
rfhorticulture@outlook.com

Scope: this sheet is general guidance, not an arborist report or legal advice. Council rules override anything here.

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