

IMPROVE TREE CARE

Take better care of the trees you have and be rewarded for years to come.



Trees need care to be healthy. Thriving trees provide benefits to you and your community. For a long-term payoff, invest extra effort in caring for trees when they are young.

Young trees need proper pruning

to create good structure for the rest of their lives. Consult a certified arborist to inspect older trees for potential problems and correct any problems early.



Water trees when it's dry.

Trees need the equivalent of 1 inch of rain per week across the entire root zone. Newly planted trees need more.



Spread mulch beneath trees. Mulch holds water in the soil and provides organic matter to nourish your trees. Consider converting the entire area beneath your trees' branches to mulch.

Protect young trees and other plants from damage by animals and landscapers. Keep lawn mowers and other power tools away from all tree trunks. Consider using mulch or fencing to create a safety zone.

LIMIT THE LAWN

Replace costly mowed lawn areas with more beneficial plants where you can.

Lawns have costs. They require intensive maintenance, such as regular mowing. Many lawns are overwatered and overfertilized. Lawn grass does not help wildlife. Stormwater may run off lawns to increase flooding.

Reduce your lawn area where you can. Consider replacing lawn grass with a range of plants, shrubs, and trees that support other species and provide other benefits.



Spread more mulch. Consider increasing the size of mulched areas around trees and shrubs and in planting beds to keep weeds down and provide nutrients to the soil.

Limit your use of lawn chemicals. Fertilizers and pesticides impact water quality and cause harm to people, pets, wildlife, and other plants.

Fertilizers, even organic ones, often wash off lawns into streams and ponds, creating algae blooms that cause poor conditions for fish and other aquatic life.

Use pesticides only as a last resort. They often are applied in ways that harm other living things, such as trees and shrubs, bees, and other pollinators. Take care to identify a problem accurately before considering a pesticide, and use the correct pesticide in the correct way.

Learn more about how you can create a healthy home landscape at chicagorti.org/healthy-homes.

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HEALTHY HOME LANDSCAPES

CREATE A HEALTHY HOME LANDSCAPE

Your yard is part of an interconnected landscape in your neighborhood and the entire Chicago region.

The way you manage your portion of this landscape makes a difference far beyond your property lines. It affects not only your property values and your lifestyle, but the health of people and pets, the well-being of beneficial wildlife such as songbirds, and the quality of our water and air.

Here are some things you can do to improve health and conservation in your yard.



CONTROL WATER

Reduce the water flowing into storm sewers for less flooding.

Plant more trees, shrubs, or gardens to soak up rainwater. A hedge or tree can make a big difference. To make sure new plants can thrive, consider how shady or sunny and wet or dry the planting spot is and choose an appropriate plant.

Direct gutter downspouts

to a rain garden: a simple but attractive garden that can hold rainwater for a time and keep it from running off and overwhelming storm sewers. Or direct rain to a rain barrel and use this water to water trees and other plants on your property.



WELCOME WILDLIFE

Provide habitat for beneficial wildlife such as birds and pollinating insects.



Offer food and shelter in your home landscape for pollinators, birds, and other beneficial animals. A variety of plants can support a wide range of animals throughout the year.



Plant a broad diversity of tree and plant species, especially native species, that can supply a wide range of needs. Native plants have coevolved with insects and animals in our region, including migrating birds, and they provide food and habitat.

Native oaks are especially important because they are keystone species: Many other plants and animals rely on them for food and shelter.



ELIMINATE INVASIVE SPECIES

Get rid of aggressive plants that crowd out more beneficial plants.



Not all that is green is good. In our region, 30% of trees are invasive species that displace better trees that would offer more habitat and other benefits. Eliminate invasive species to improve the health of your property and properties

nearby. For example, replace a privacy hedge of invasive buckthorn with a noninvasive shrub species to provide a wide range of benefits and interest.

Garlic mustard, buckthorn, and amur honeysuckle are examples of invasive plants that create poor conditions for desirable plants and animals. They spread quickly and take over entire landscapes, degrade the soil, and rob animals of food. In our region, it costs millions of dollars a year to manage buckthorn and honeysuckle alone.



Invasive plants must be removed or killed. Controlling each species calls for a different approach. Garlic mustard plants can be pulled up, but controlling invasive shrubs may require limited and careful use of herbicides.



CONSERVE OAKS

Plant and protect oak trees, now and for the future.

Native oaks are losing ground. New oak trees are not naturally growing to take over for older oaks. They need our help. Together, our yards can be corridors of habitat with oaks and other native plants that support songbirds, butterflies, and other beneficial wildlife that rely on them.

Protecting oaks is up to you. In the Chicago region, 70% of oak ecosystems are on private property. Only property owners can preserve those oak trees and plant more.