

# Alternatives to Tree Removal | Earth 911

*Gemma Alexander*

Homeowners remove trees for many reasons, but there are often better solutions – you really can [plant your tree](#) and keep it, too. And yet, urban [tree cover is declining](#) all over the United States, and new development projects don't account for all of the tree loss they create.

Trees provide aesthetic, social, environmental, and even economic [benefits](#). Houses with trees [sell faster](#) and at higher prices. You don't have to be part of the problem, consider these alternatives to removing trees.

Most tree problems are caused by planting a tree too close to a structure or planting the wrong species for the site. The [Right Tree Right Place](#) guide can help you avoid choosing a tree that will interfere with utilities, cause damage to your home, or create hazards.

## Get an Arborist

If you already have a tree that is causing problems, a knowledgeable arborist can solve many tree problems without resorting to tree removal. Even when it's the best choice, tree removal and pruning large branches are jobs best left to the professionals.

DIY tree cutting can be [dangerous](#). And [inexpert pruning](#) is often the root cause (pardon the pun) of problems that will lead to tree removal in the future. An arborist will also know if your community [requires permits](#) for tree work. But be warned, anybody with a pickup truck and a chainsaw can call themselves an arborist. To make sure your job gets done right, look for an arborist who is certified by the [International Society of Arboriculture](#).

## Dealing With Problem Roots

[Problem roots](#) cause pipe failure less often than people think. Changes in the soil from compaction or freeze-thaw cycles create cracks in pipes, usually at the joints. Roots grow towards existing ruptures, where nutrients and moisture are plentiful. But once the roots successfully invade the interior of the pipe, they can fill it completely. Tree removal does [not always solve](#) this problem, as the cracks remain and the stump or remaining roots may continue to grow.

Pipe replacement is the best, lasting solution, but homeowners often opt to manage the problem through maintenance. Routine administration of chemical treatments can keep roots out of pipes. Consider using [copper sulfate crystals](#), which are safer than aquatic herbicides. For an even greener option, blocked sewers can be mechanically cleared to prevent damage. It's best to do this maintenance annually.

The presence of tree roots in a foundation crack is circumstantial evidence that the tree caused the problem. But roots are rarely the cause of the crack or even strong

enough to enlarge it. In some cases, the soil type, tree species, and proximity of the tree to the house may call for installation of a [root barrier](#) at the foundation.

When trees are planted too close to sidewalks or when soil is very compacted, tree roots can interfere with nearby pavement, causing cracks and lifting of concrete to create hazards. Sometimes, problem roots can be resolved by pruning. But root pruning can harm tree health and risks destabilizing the tree. Lifting or moving the pavement or installing [root barriers](#) will usually be more effective.

## Disarming Hazard Trees

Falling branches and toppling trees usually occur during extreme weather conditions, such as heavy winds, snow, or ice storms, or when the ground is super-saturated from intense rain. While some tree species drop branches more readily than others, most trees can withstand routine bad weather.

Arborists can identify which trees pose a hazard. For a tree to be hazardous, it must be both defective and located where it can become a target. Trees that have suffered extensive root damage – for example, from construction – are less stable and more liable to fall during winter or other extreme weather. Other [risk factors](#) include dead branches, cavities and rot, poor branching structure (which is often a result of bad pruning), or being smothered by vines.

Many [risks can be managed](#) by pruning out the defective branches or simply moving the target so that branches can fall harmlessly. Even trees at risk of falling can often recover health with proper maintenance or be secured with techniques like cabling and bracing.

## Opening Blocked Views?

One of the most common reasons for cutting down a tree is that it blocks the view. But trees *are* the view. Surgery patients who can see trees from their hospital beds actually [recover faster](#) and significant research confirms that [exposure to trees](#) improves human health and happiness.

At the very least, consider trees the frame for the view. A row of [topped trees](#) is an ugly frame and so are the rooftops and driveways that are exposed by tree removal. Instead, consider [expert pruning techniques](#) like windowing, interlimbing, or skirting up that create views without destroying the trees. These approaches will maximize the desired view while obscuring ugly foreground details and maintaining the [benefits](#) of healthy trees.

And, if you must remove a tree, always take the time to plant a new one to take up the CO<sub>2</sub> your old tree used to absorb.

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