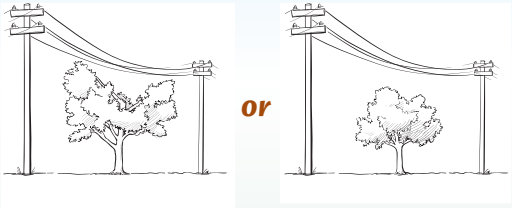
Trees and Utilities

Selecting the right tree for the right place in the landscape is an important decision.

Proper tree selection and placement around utilities can eliminate potential public safety hazards, reduce expenses by utilities and their rate payers, and improve the appearance of landscapes. Planting a tree in an inappropriate location can mean future repeated tree pruning, tree interference with utility service or even tree removal. So, remember to look up and down prior to selecting an appropriate tree and location.



With today's consistent service, we often take for granted this service will be uninterrupted. Service is delivered to our homes by overhead or underground distribution systems. Overhead lines can be electrical, telephone, cable or television. Underground lines include services such as water, sewer, and natural gas. These systems impact the proper selection of tree species and selection of planting site.

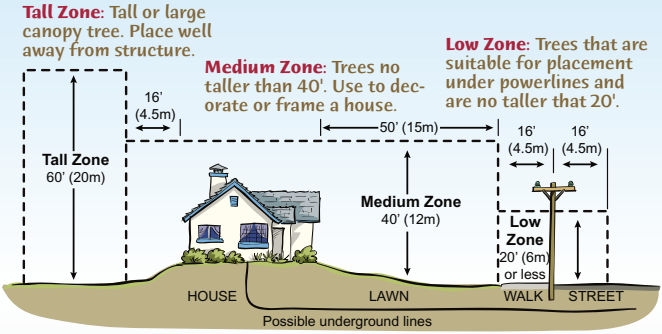
Planting trees under utility lines can pose a hazard to humans by electrical shock and to personal property from fires. In California, one of the leading causes of power outages is tree interference. These outages can affect public safety, cause business losses and residential inconvenience. In addition,millions of dollars are spent on removal or clearance of vegetation.

(see reverse)

Underground utilities should be located prior to tree planting. Locate underground lines by requesting an Underground Service Alert (USA) by calling 1-800-227-2600. This simple and free service ensures safety for the excavator, and homeowner and prevents damage to underground utilities.

Although many roots and lines exist underground without incident, be aware that many tree roots extend over twice the diameter of the canopy. Root damage can occur during digging which may affect a tree's health.

When planning for a tree, consider the mature tree height and the available space overhead and underground. To aid in identifying tree placement, divide your landscape into three areas; tall zone, medium zone and low zone.



Inappropriate trees planted under utility lines require annual pruning, which often leads to an unnatural shape, structural weakness, and greater stress that increases susceptibility to disease and insect invasion.

Homeowners should not attempt to prune trees near power lines. Call a certified utility tree worker or your local utility company. Ask a local certified arborist or UCCE Master Gardener for a recommended tree list.

For more information on tree care refer to the ANR website at http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu, your local UC Cooperative Extension office, consult a certified arborist, or call your local utility office.

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