

Trees and Power Lines



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: We love our beautiful trees, but we need to keep well away from power lines.

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Everyone in Florida knows we are in the midst of another hurricane season. There are signs on the sides of the road counting down the days until the end of the season. Your local meteorologists and emergency management officials are constantly reminding everyone to be prepared, and to have a hurricane emergency box of supplies that will last you and your family at least three days. However, as anyone who has lived in Tallahassee for any length of time knows, it doesn't take a hurricane to cause tree and power line problems.

Tallahassee is a tree loving community. We are a Tree City USA city and Your Own Utilities is a TreeLine USA utility. But at the end of the day (when the afternoon thunderstorms hit) trees can cause you and your neighbors to lose electric power. No matter how much or how often we prune the trees near the power lines, the potential always exist that they will cause an outage. Why do they do this? Is Mother Nature getting us back for building roads through her forests? Is our karma so bad that we are forced to suffer the sweltering weather with no power to run the AC? Are the trees just out to get us? While these may all be partially true the real reason trees cause outages is that they are good conductors of electricity, especially when they are wet.

Trees can cause an electric outage in two ways. One, they can fall over and tear the wires down completely or two, the tree limbs can lay across the wires or simply brush against them. Either event will result in what is commonly known as a "short circuit". Electricity is always looking for the shortest path to the ground and a tree or branch lying across the wires provides a pathway for that to happen.

When that happens usually a fuse will blow, (that's the explosion you sometimes hear just before the lights go out) or the entire circuit will go out causing the whole neighborhood to lose power. So, what can we do to stop this from happening?

As a homeowner, it's very important to make sure that your trees are healthy. You can do this by having them regularly inspected by a Certified Arborist. When your trees have lived beyond their prime and begun to decline have them removed – your Arborist can advise you of this situation. This protects you and your property as well as the power lines that bring electricity to your neighborhood. Visit our Utility Forestry page at Talgov.com for tips on how to hire an Arborist. We also have a list of power line compatible trees if you want to plant a tree near overhead lines.

Your Own Utilities helps to prevent power outages by maintaining a regularly scheduled tree pruning program near City power lines. The program covers our entire service territory, with trees being pruned every 18 months. We are different from most utilities in that we prune the trees a smaller amount at any given time, but we do it more often. This results in less “sucker growth” after the pruning operation as well as a more pleasing and natural appearance. If you would like to have input into how your trees are pruned all you have to do is let us know by responding to the doorhanger notification our contractor distributes before the maintenance pruning is performed. Call the number provided and someone will be happy to discuss options to managing the trees near the power lines.

Finally, I would be derelict in my duty if I didn't offer the standard warning about downed power lines. It is simple; **STAY CLEAR OF ALL DOWNED LINES!** Also stay clear of trees that are lying across or against power lines. If you see wires down or trees down on wires call Your Own Utilities at 891-4YOU (4968).

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