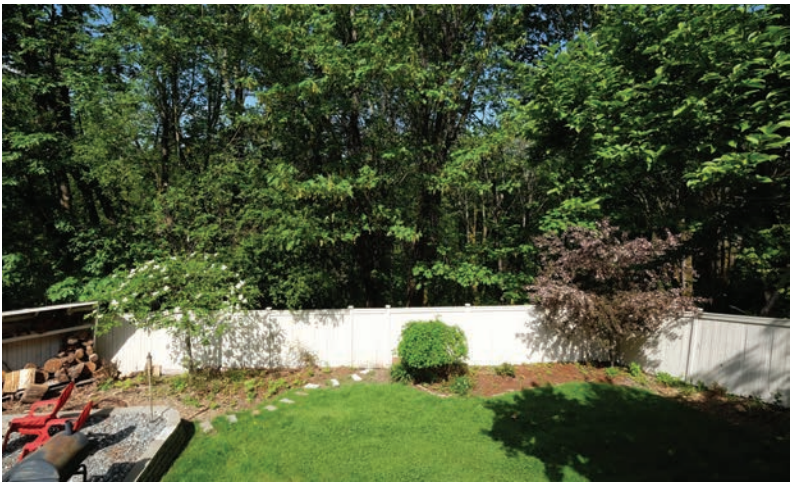
YOUR YARD MATTERS

A GUIDE TO BEING A GOOD PARK NEIGHBOR

TABLE OF CONTENTS

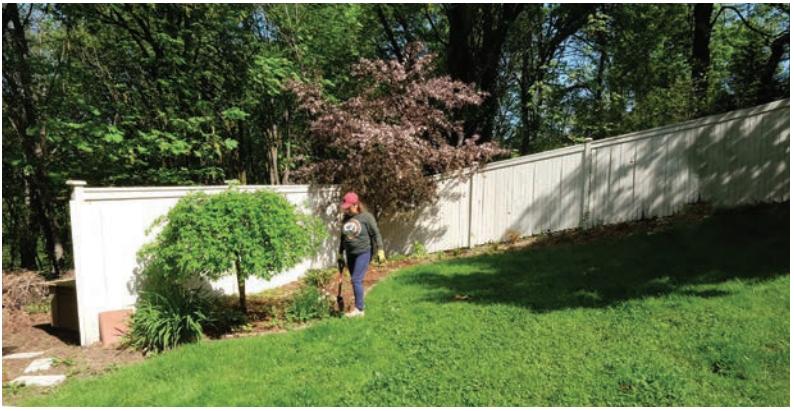


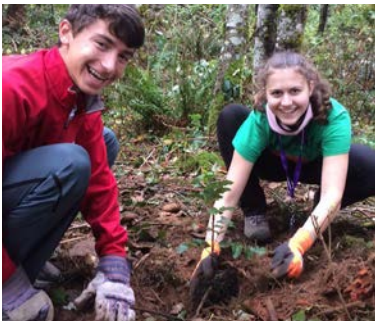
YOUR YARD MATTERS

Your yard matters to your community! The trees and plants in your yard make:

- Your neighborhood healthier
- Your air cleaner
- Your water clearer
- All while giving birds, bees, and other wildlife important places to live!

When you live next to a natural area, your yard is an extension of native forest habitats. You can protect these valuable habitats by actively managing your yard. By controlling aggressive weeds in your yard and replacing them with native or non-invasive plants you're also helping protect your neighbors' yards and your community's public natural areas. This guide will help you get started and take action!





PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to introduce you to several important topics related to caring for your yard and being a responsible park neighbor. The purpose of this guide is also to connect you with existing resources that can help guide your stewardship activities and provide more detailed information on the topics presented. With this guide, you have the information needed to start restoring and protecting the natural resources (soil, water, air, plants, animals) in your yard and help protect the natural areas next to your yard.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each section of this guide provides information about the importance of the topic and how you can take simple steps toward improved stewardship. Be sure to look at all the sections in this guide, as each offers helpful guidance that complements the other sections. This guide should be used as a starting point and quick reference when planning or starting new work in your yard. It hopefully also helps you better understand and appreciate the unique natural areas in your neighborhood. You are encouraged to use the additional resources listed in this guide to find more information and connect with experts to get answers to your questions or useful advice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide is the result of a partnership and collaboration between King Conservation District's Urban Forest Health Management Program, City of Seattle Parks, Green Seattle Partnership, Trees for Seattle and Dirt Corps. Special thanks are given to the staff of these organizations, their investment of time, effort, and their generosity in sharing information and resources made possible the development and publication of this guide.

Your Yard Matters – A Guide to Being a Good Park Neighbor was developed by the following partners:

- King Conservation District
- City of Seattle Parks
- Green Seattle Partnership
- Trees for Seattle
- Dirt Corps

WHAT IS AN INVASIVE PLANT?

"Invasive plant" is a term for a plant that has become a weed pest: a plant which grows quickly and aggressively, spreads easily, and forces out other plants. The most aggressive weeds can easily grow among existing healthy plants. Invasive plants are bad news: they are difficult to control and can move from one area to another to take over a whole landscape. Many non-native plants can become invasive and threaten our natural open spaces and forested parks. Here are some top "offenders" to look out for and control.

INVASIVE VINES: English Ivy and Clematis

Clematis
Photo: King County Noxious Weed Program

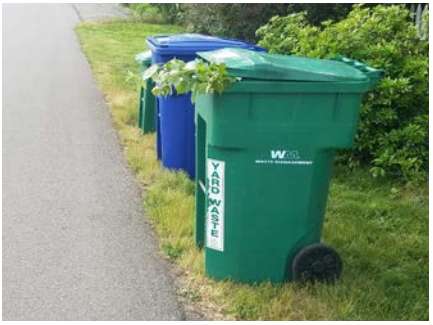
Ivy

English ivy and clematis are quick growing climbing plants that can take over a tree in no time. Both can kill large trees by weighing down branches and intercepting water and light. Both spread easily by seed: clematis by wind and ivy by birds. Left alone, ivy can take over large areas killing all other plants and often creating homes for rats.

MANAGING INVASIVE VINES

If ivy or clematis is growing up a tree, creating "life-saver" or "survival rings" is the first step to save your tree and reduce the number of ivy seeds. Here's how.

1. Start by cutting all vines at shoulder height, then again at the bottom of the tree.
2. Remove the cut sections of the ivy from the trunk
3. Do not attempt to pull vines above out of the tree; they will wither and die on their own and pulling them down from high branches can be dangerous and may damage the tree.
4. Dig out the vine roots in a radius that is at least 5 feet away from the tree.
5. Pulled vines should be disposed of in your curb side yard waste bin.



Removing ivy and clematis by hand is the most effective method of controlling these aggressive weeds. Use of herbicides to control these vines is not recommended and should only be done by an experienced professional.

DID YOU KNOW THERE ARE INVASIVE TREES?

You know about invasive weeds like ivy and blackberry, but did you know that there are invasive trees too? They are more common than you may think in yards and communities. Afterall, they are often easy to grow and have likely spread from other yards and landscapes. The problem is they do a fabulous job of growing in places that we don't want them to grow in, including forested natural areas where they shade out native vegetation and make it virtually impossible for other plants to grow. Birds are often the culprit for moving these trees around, feasting on abundant berries and seeds and carrying them to nearby yards.

Here, we will focus on two of the worst offenders: holly and laurel.

Holly
Photo: King County Noxious Weed Program

Laurel
Photo: King County Noxious Weed Program

Holly and laurel can spread easily and are difficult to kill. If holly and laurel are only cut back, they will re-sprout from stumps. Both can grow in heavy shade and produce fruits that are highly attractive to birds.

MANAGING INVASIVE TREES

Small tree seedlings can be pulled by hand or dug out with hand tools. The key to success is to remove all roots so the invasive tree doesn't re-sprout.

When removing a larger invasive tree, it is still important to remove the roots which can be done by digging them out with a shovel or other hand tools. If you don't remove the roots the tree will quickly regrow multiple new stems, making the problem much worse.

For especially large trees, consider hiring a professional to do this work. Refer to the Hiring of a Professional topic on how and when to hire a professional for your invasive tree removal needs.

There are many other common invasive trees that are unfortunately found in our forested natural areas including: golden chain tree, horse chestnut, black locust, and some non-native maples, hawthorns, and mountain ash, among others. Consulting King County Noxious Weeds can help you identify if any trees on your property are one of these invasive trees.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ANSWERS TO YOUR INVASIVE PLANT QUESTIONS:

King County Noxious Weeds - *kingcounty.gov*, search "noxious weeds" or call 206-477-WEED (206-477-9333)

THE NEXT BIG INVADERS?

Did you know that many invasive plants were first well-loved yard plants? In fact, you can still buy many problematic plants at garden centers. Carefully consider the plants that you choose to plant in your yard. Watch closely for plants that spread quickly and may become invasive and damaging to other plants.

Some particularly aggressive invasive plants that have invaded natural areas include:

Yellow archangel – Easily identified by leaf color, creeps along the ground and can be very challenging to remove, especially among desirable plants.

Photo: Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board

Vinca – Also known as periwinkle, this groundcover grows fast but ends up acting a lot like ivy, smothering small plants in its wake.

Italian arum – This toxic plant to humans (skin) is becoming an issue in Seattle. It spreads from tubers that easily break apart, as well as from its bright orange berries eaten by birds.

Photo: Ansel Oomen, Bugwood.org

Bamboo – As attractive and functional bamboo is, it can quickly get out of control. Most spread underground with runners and can re-root easily from root fragments.

Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org

FOR POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION AND PROPER DISPOSAL OF INVASIVE PLANTS:

Consult King County Noxious Weeds program at 206-477-WEED (206-477-9333).

MULCH, MULCH, AND MULCH AGAIN!

What is mulch?
Mulch can refer to any type of non-living ground cover. Here, we are specifically talking about wood chips.

Arguably, there is nothing better you can do for your trees than mulch them. Proper mulching helps your tree get enough water during dry summer months, keeps away grass and weeds that compete with your tree, protects your tree from damage by lawn mowers and weed whackers (you don't need to get so close!), and breaks down slowly over time to feed your tree. It's a simple way to keep your trees healthy and to give your yard a well-cared for look.

WHAT TYPE OF MULCH SHOULD I USE FOR MY TREES?

There are a few types of mulch, and some are better than others.

Arborist wood chips are the best for mulching trees and shrubs. Arborist wood chips come from older trees' pruned branches and stems. They include both green parts (leaves) and brown (woody) parts. They have some large and some small pieces. The mix of green and brown is a great combination, as the green parts break down quickly to add nutrients to the soil, the brown woody parts break down more slowly over 1-3 years. Arborist wood chips do the best job of holding water in the soil, keeping soil the righttemperature, and controlling weeds.

Large wood chips are more uniform in nature and do not have any green (leaf) material. These chips have been processed. However, because they are large in size (ideally at least an inch long) they shouldn't break down too quickly and will still help prevent weeds and hold in water. These chips are second best for your tree if you cannot get arborist wood chips.

Don't confuse **beauty bark** for wood chips. It's a woody material that is very small, uniform, and contains no green (leaf) parts. Beauty bark breaks down very quickly, meaning it must be replaced often. Some beauty bark is dyed (red is common). This dye is not something you want in your soil or local water ways - which is where the dye will go as the bark quickly breaks down. Avoid beauty bark in your yard.

HOW DO I MULCH A TREE CORRECTLY?

Weed first: Removing grass and any plants from around the base of your tree is a simple way to keep a tree healthy and protect it from weed whacker damage. Grass and plants compete with trees, absorbing water and nutrients from the soil. Once you've removed the grass and plants, lay down a 2- to 4-inch thick layer of mulch to hold soil moisture, control weeds, and protect the soil from extreme summer and winter temperatures.

Donuts, please: Spread mulch around the base of your tree or shrub. Keep the mulch in a doughnut shape by staying a hands-width away from the trunk. Mulch that is touching the trunk leads to decay which over time can kill your tree and cause it to fall over.

Avoid Mulch Volcanos: Mulch volcanos are created when you pile mulch high around the trunk of a tree or shrub. You see it often in commercial landscapes, but it should not be repeated in your yard! Piling mulch against the trunk of a tree leads to a host of problems including disease, rot, and potentially tree death.

FOR MORE GUIDANCE ON MULCHING:

Trees for Seattle (video) - *seattle.gov/trees/mulch.html*
King County - *kingcounty.gov,* search for "go native mulch"
Washington State University - *gardening.wsu.edu*, search "compost mulch"

FOR GETTING MULCH:

Chip Drop - *getchipdrop.com*

GET PLANTING

There are many wonderful native plants to have in your landscape. When buying plants, be sure to refer to the botanical name (in parenthesis below) as some different plants have the same common name. Native plants can be found at many plant nurseries, at numerous plant sales put on by local organizations throughout the year, and there are even programs you can participate in that will help salvage native plants from areas being developed. Here are a few to help you get started:

Shore pine *(Pinus contorta* var. *contorta)* – full sun; highly adaptable, even in poor soils; nice backdrop in landscape; in ideal conditions can grow quickly to 30-35 feet tall.

Photo: City of Seattle, Trees for Seattle Program

Vine maple *(Acer circinatum)* – small tree to 15-20 feet tall; prefers partial to full shade; dry to wet areas; seeds for wildlife; vibrant fall colors.

Western serviceberry *(Amelanchier alnifolia)* – taller shrub to 15 feet tall; dry to moist soils; great for adding beautiful spring flowers and color to your yard and edible fruit.

Red Flowering currant *(Ribes sanguineum)* – medium shrub; dry to somewhat moist sites; partial to full shade; excellent hummingbird magnet with deep pink flowers.

Mock orange *(Philadelphus lewisii)* – medium to taller shrub to 10 feet tall; can take a wide variety of soils; good on slopes; showy, fragrant flowers, birds like fruit.

Tall Oregon grape *(Mahonia aquifolium)* – shrub that can grow to 8 feet tall; dry soils, full to partial sun; small yellow flowers and delicious edible fruit

Evergreen huckleberry *(Vaccinium ovatum)* – medium evergreen shrub; prefers some sun; pink bell-shaped flowers; sweet purplish black fruit

Goatsbeard *(Aruncus dioicus)* – graceful woodland perennial, grows 3-6 feet tall with stems supporting long plumes of tiny white flowers; needs some shade and moisture.

Sword fern *(Polystichum munitum)* – provides great evergreen cover in partial to full shade; nice texture and backdrop for other plants; requires limited maintenance.

Western yarrow *(Achillea millefolium)* – delightful perennial, grows to 3 feet tall, fernlike leaves and flat-topped cluster of white flowers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

King County – *kingcounty.gov*:

- For native plant nurseries, search "native plant nurseries Washington"
- For gardening with native plants, search "native plant resources"
- For native plant guide, search "native plant guide Western Washington"

Washington Native Plant Society – *wnps.org*, search "native gardening"

King Conservation District – *kingcd.org*, search "native plants"

Regional Garden Hotline – *gardenhotline.org* or call (206) 663-0224

YARD WASTE & TRASH

Responsibly managing and disposing of your yard's plant waste such as grass clippings, pulled weeds, and discarded potted plants is a very important way you can support healthy natural areas across Seattle.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF YARD WASTE

- **DON'T** dump your yard waste in parks, other natural areas, or adjacent properties. Dumped yard waste harms these areas and may add invasive plants to sensitive habitats and encourage more dumping.
- **DON'T** pile yard waste or other debris on or above steep slopes – piles add weight and retain moisture on the slope, potentially increasing your risk for landslides.
- **DON'T** pile yard waste or other debris against the base of a tree –it may rot the trunk and hurt your tree's health.
- **DON'T** put invasive weeds in a home compost pile.
- **DO** use your curb side yard waste bin for leaves, grass clippings, trees, brush, invasive weeds, and branches (cut down to 4 inches or less in diameter and 4 feet or less in length).
- **DO** put State-designated noxious weeds in your trash bin.
- **DO** take large yard waste material to the City Transfer Stations (all trees or brush must be 8 feet or less in length and less than 8 inches in diameter).

LET'S TALK ABOUT TRASH

Dumping garbage into forests and public green spaces will have a negative impact on the environment and on the public health as well. Some of the negative impacts of dumping trash include:

- Trash can be ideal breeding ground for mosquitos and rodents
- Trash can damage many native plants and animals
- Garbage may contain hazardous waste that spreads into soils and water
- Broken glass can be stepped on causing injury and infections

Do your part to keep our communities clean and safe.
Don't dump and do report illegal dumping to (206) 684-7587.

STEEP SLOPES AND EROSION CONTROL

Steep slopes are an important reality to consider in our area. Unstable slope conditions can quickly lead to minor or severe landslides, especially during our rainy winter months. Before moving forward with yard care or tree work on or above steep slopes, consider the following:

- Removing trees on steep slopes is limited by Seattle Ordinance.
- Managing large patches of invasive plants on steep slopes may require a permit.
- Plants, especially trees, provide an effective structure for reducing erosion and improving slope stability.

Before undertaking any work on or above steep slopes, consult the resources below and contact city staff for clarification of any questions you have about City of Seattle rules and regulations at the Department of Construction and Inspection at 206-684-8600, or *seattle.gov*, search "SDCI."

It is highly recommended that you use an experienced professional, who is familiar with local laws, to complete work on steep slopes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BEST PRACTICES FOR STEEP SLOPES:

greenbeltconsulting.com provides several useful articles including a check-list for slope re-vegetation

FOR GUIDANCE ON LOCAL RULES AND REGULATIONS RELATED TO STEEP SLOPES:

City of Seattle Environmental Critical Areas (ECA) Municipal Code – *seattle.gov*, search "ECA Code" Includes:

Tip 331 Trees and Vegetation
Tip 331A Vegetation Restoration
Tip 331B Hazard Trees

EROSION CONTROL

To reduce the amount of erosion that can occur on your property, keep in mind the following:

- Bare soil can easily erode, even on a minor slope, so it's best to keep as much vegetation in place as possible.
- Plan ahead, if you do remove vegetation, replant the area as soon as possible and mulch areas that have been disturbed to minimize bare soil.
- If you can't replant soon after clearing an area, use straw or other mulch to cover bare soil, especially during the rainy season.
- Consider using drip irrigation or soaker hoses (slow watering) for new plants to reduce the amount of water that runs off the surface of the soil.

The best way to significantly reduce erosion is with plants – ideally evergreen shrubs and trees. Their leaves intercept rain, slowing down and reducing the amount of water that reaches the ground. During our rainy season in the winter, deciduous plants lose their leaves and aren't as effective as evergreen plants. However, all plants have root systems that hold soil in place which helps prevent soil erosion.

There are some native plants that perform well on slopes and can help prevent erosion once established. Evergreen shrub options for a slope include Pacific Wax Myrtle in sunny spots and Pacific Rhododendron in shade. Groundcovers such as Salal, Creeping Oregon Grape, and Kinnikinnick do well also on slopes when they are planted in the right places.

Photo: nativeplantsnw.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NATIVE PLANTS AND THEIR GROWING CONDITIONS:

kingcounty.gov and search "go native"

WHY ARE CONIFERS SO IMPORTANT?

Ask people from around the world what comes to mind when they think of the Pacific Northwest, and large evergreen conifer trees are at the top of the list. Trees like Douglas fir, western red cedar, and hemlock define this region we call home. These trees have shaped human culture for as long as humans have lived here.

Conifers are trees that have cones. Most keep their needles or leaves throughout the winter, but a few like larches and dawn redwoods change color in the fall before dropping their needles. Here are some of the reasons why large evergreen conifers are important.

CONIFERS AND PEOPLE

- Large evergreen trees are a symbol of Seattle and part of what makes this area unique
- Conifers make it easier to breathe by cleaning our air
- Conifers can help people reduce stress and recover from illness
- Conifers add structure and interest to your yard
- Properly placed, conifers can provide a year-round living privacy screen
- Well-placed conifers may help cut home energy costs; shade in summer and wind buffer in winter
- Conifers are sacred trees to several Native American communities

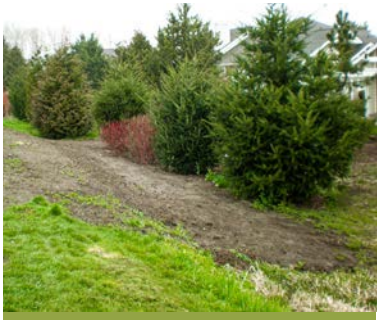
CONIFERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- Conifers can stabilize slopes and reduce landslide risk
- They are natural birdfeeders and sustain a variety of wildlife
- Conifers can store more carbon and for longer than other trees
- Large evergreen conifers catch rain in the winter, helping water soak into the soil rather than running down our roads and washing pollutants into our lakes and rivers.

HOW CAN YOU HELP CONIFERS?

You have a role to play in making sure Seattle continues to be home to these beloved and valuable trees.

- **Retain mature conifers.**Hire a qualified professional to assess and manage the health and safety of your big trees (see "Hire a Professional")
- **Keep ivy and other invasive plants away** from conifers so your trees stay healthy (see "Invasive Plants")
- **Never top a conifer (or any tree).** Hire an ISA Certified Arborist (see "Hire a Professional") if you need any work done on your trees.
- **If you have room, plant a conifer.** There are a few great native conifers that can be nice additions to your yard. Consider smaller varieties of Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) such as "Excelsior" or "Hogan" for smaller spaces. Incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*) is also a good looking mid-sized conifer.



FOR MORE HELP ON TREE SELECTION AND GETTING FREE TREES (INCLUDING SOME CONIFERS)

Seattle's Trees for Neighborhoods program by going to *seattle.gov/trees* under "Trees for Neighborhoods" or call (206) 684-3979.

WHEN AND HOW TO HIRE PROFESSIONALS

TO HELP WITH INVASIVE PLANTS

Sometimes invasive plants require more aggressive management that is better suited to a professional. Here are some questions you should ask and the type of answers you want to hear before hiring a professional:

What knowledge do they have about invasive plant management?
They should be able to identify invasive plants on your property and be able to describe the best management practices for controlling them and explain why their method of control will work.

Are they a licensed herbicide applicator?
They should be a Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) licensed herbicide applicator and should have endorsements on their license. They should be able to provide you an applicator license number, so you can look up their license type and endorsements. You can also search the WSDA license database at *agr.wa.gov*, search: pesticide licensing search.

Photo: King County Noxious Weed Program

Are they aware of local permitting and other regulations?
They should be familiar with local permitting and other regulations related to herbicide use in the City of Seattle. They should be able to explain what permits are required for the work you're asking them to do or why no permits are required.

Are they licensed, bonded, and insured to work in Seattle?
They should be able to provide you proof that they are licensed, bonded, and insured to work in Seattle.

To find a qualified professional consult Plant Amnesty's Arborist/Gardener Referral Service – *plantamnesty.org* under "Services"

HIRING TREE PROFESSIONALS

Finding an arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) is critical to receiving quality tree work. The certification means the arborist has demonstrated basic knowledge of trees and experience in tree care.

Services provided by certified arborists include pruning, tree health care (diagnosis and preventative maintenance), tree removal, emergency tree work, and more.

For a directory of local certified arborists look at *pnwisa.org* under "Find an Arborist."

If you need someone to assess the safety of your tree make sure the person you hire has a ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Additional information to get when considering hiring a professional includes their prices, reputation, and customer service quality. Request a bid from any professional you are considering using and ideally get multiple bids. Check for online reviews of the professional, ask neighbors or friends for referrals, or ask for a reference from a previous client.

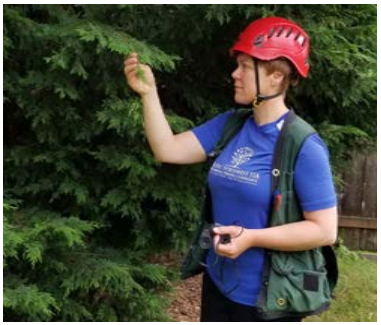


Photo: Collins Tree Service (NH)

CITY RESOURCES

FOR LOCAL RULES AND REGULATIONS

Seattle Dept of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) - 206-684-8600

Weeds and Overgrown Vegetation Law – *seattle.gov* search "overgrown vegetation"

Private Property Tree Regulations – *seattle.gov* search "tree protection"

Steep Slope Regulations - *seattle.gov* search "Environmental Critical Areas"

FOR REPORTING ILLEGAL DUMPING

Seattle Public Utilities – *seattle.gov* search "report illegal dumping" or call (206) 684-7587

FOR REPORTING ILLEGAL TREE REMOVAL

Dept of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) – *seattle.gov* search "make property complaint" or call (206) 615-0808

FOR GUIDANCE ON WHERE TO PUT YARD WASTE AND HOW TO COMPOST:

Where Does it Go? (Seattle Public Utilities) – *seattle.gov* search "where does it go"

FOR GETTING FREE TREES TO PLANT IN YOUR YARD:

Trees for Neighborhoods – *seattle.gov/trees/treesforneighborhoods.htm*

FOR GETTING FREE ADVICE ON YARD AND GARDEN CARE:

Garden Hotline – *gardenhotline.org* or call (206) 663-0224 to ask an expert your yard, garden, and weed ID questions

FOR GETTING INVOLVED IN CARING FOR SEATTLE TREES AND FORESTS:

Green Seattle Partnership - *greenseattle.org* or email info@greenseattle.org

Seattle Tree Ambassador Program - *seattle.gov/trees/treeambassador.htm* or email treeambassador@seattle.gov

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SEATTLE'S URBAN FORESTRY PROGRAMS:

Trees for Seattle - *seattle.gov/trees* or contact treesforseattle@seattle.gov or call (206) 684-TREE (8733)