



# TREE NEWS

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## TREE LINGO – HOW TO TALK TREES WITH INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

Urban forestry differs from traditional forestry because the focus is not timber production or wilderness management. Instead, urban forestry centers on trees growing in cities, parks, neighborhoods, and developed landscapes where public safety, infrastructure, aesthetics, and ecosystem services are major considerations.

Walking into a conversation with arborists, urban foresters, or tree care professionals can sometimes feel like learning a new language. Terms like “DBH,” “plant health care” and “PHC,” or “codominant stems” get tossed around casually, leaving newcomers unsure of what is being discussed. Some terms may be used interchangeably when they are not properly understood, such as “pruning,” “trimming,” or “topping,” yet they mean different things.

Urban forestry also includes a surprising amount of operational jargon. Professionals may talk about “utility pruning,” “line clearance,” or “rigging.” Unlike forest settings, urban tree work often involves power lines, sidewalks, roadways, bylaws, and public interaction. Discussions among professionals frequently highlight these unique urban challenges.

Learning tree terminology is more than memorizing definitions. It improves communication between clients, municipalities, researchers, and tree care professionals and helps bridge the gap between technical expertise and public understanding.

### **Glossary of Common Urban Forestry Terms**

**Arborist** – A person who works with trees for a living.

**Canopy** – The collective layer of tree crowns in an area.

**Cambium** – Living tissue layer producing new wood and bark.

**Codominant stems** – Two competing main stems with weak attachment potential.

**Crown** – The upper branches and foliage of a tree.

**DBH** – Diameter at breast height; standard tree diameter measurement at 4.5 feet.

**Decay** – Wood decomposition caused by fungi.

**ISA Certified Arborist** – a professional who has studied, passed an industry-specific exam, (and is required to maintain triennial credentials) related to industry-specific work practices.

**Lateral branch** – A side branch that grows outward from a main stem, trunk, or larger branch.

**Line clearance** – Pruning or removing vegetation to maintain safe distances from electrical utility lines and infrastructure.

**Mitigation** – Actions taken to reduce tree risk.

**Plant health care (PHC)** – A holistic approach to maintaining the health, vitality, and longevity of trees and landscape plants through monitoring, prevention, and targeted management practices.

**Pruning** – The selective removal of branches, stems, or other plant parts to improve a tree’s structure, health, safety, or appearance.

**Rigging** – The use of ropes, pulleys, blocks, friction devices, and other equipment to safely lower or control

tree sections during pruning or removal.

**Root flare** – Area where the trunk widens into roots at ground level.

**Snag** – A standing dead tree, often important for wildlife habitat.

**Spar** – The remaining upright section of a tree trunk after the crown and branches have been removed.

**Stem** – The main structural axis of a tree; may be considered as the trunk of the tree.

**Structural pruning** – Pruning aimed at improving long-term tree architecture.

**Target** – A person, structure, or object that could be impacted by tree failure.

**Topping** – A harmful tree practice involving the indiscriminate cutting of large branches or stems back to stubs or lateral branches that are too small to assume the terminal role.

**Trimming** – A casual or non-technical term often incorrectly used in place of pruning; can imply indiscriminate cutting rather than intentional, science-based tree care.

**Urban forest** – The collection of trees and vegetation within a developed area.

**Union** – The point where two branches or stems join together.

**Utility pruning** – Pruning performed to maintain clearance from power lines.

### CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Dr. Sharon Jean-Philippe  
Lee Rumble  
Jaq Payne

Dr. Natalie Bumgarner  
Neal Vercler  
Kayla Stuart

Sam Adams  
Walker Fowler  
Mel Cooke

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