
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES GROUP

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Regulated Tree Tip Sheet

What is a Tree? Per 19.16

This seems like an obvious question. But since we regulate certain trees and not others we need to clarify.

Tree: Any living woody plant species other than a [shrub](#), characterized by one main trunk or few dominant trunks and many branches, known to achieve a typical mature height of at least 15 feet.

Alder and Cottonwood are now considered regulated trees once over 10" in diameter and may be considered exceptional in a grove. However these species are short lived. Cottonwoods may be high risk if too close to a target as determined by a Qualified Arborist.

What is not a tree

Any shrub or hedge

Trees that are mostly planted as a hedge do not count as trees for removal or replanting. See below for shrubs species.

What is a shrub? Per 19.16

Shrub: Any living woody plant species characterized by having multiple vertical or semiupright branches originating at or near the ground and is known to achieve a typical mature height of less than 15 feet. Species include without limitation, rhododendrons, pyramidalis, laurel, boxwood and other ornamental [shrubs](#)

The following species are not considered trees. They are considered shrubs. And are non-native species. Unless grown in tree form and exceed 30" in diameter and in good health and structure, and not invasive.

1. Leyland cypress x *Cupressocyparis leylandii*
2. Arborvitae *Thuja occidentalis*
3. English laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*
4. English Holly *Ilex aquifolium*
5. Black locust *Robinia pseudoacacia*

These species do not require a permit to remove outside a critical area. They also do not count as a tree for required replanting mitigation.

Explanation

Because we are attempting to keep track of tree removal and if more than 70% of trees are removed over 5 years. And if that threshold is met, development may be postponed. The problem with these trees especially being planted as a hedge is one hedge being removed could trip this 70% threshold.

This interpretation is backed up by the replanting requirements requiring primary planting of native species. Most of the above listed species are hybrid nonnatives meant for fast growing hedge.