

Spencer Conservation Commission



Tree and Shrub Replacement Guidelines

This Guidance Document was created to provide helpful information to landowners wishing to cut trees on their property which require mitigation plantings, per Spencer's Tree Removal Policy. Native plants in and near wetlands will intercept pollutants, slow down runoff from adjacent land, provide some wildlife habitat, and reduce the use of watering, pesticides, and herbicides.

What kind of Mitigation Planting is required?

According to Spencer's Tree Removal Policy, the loss of trees cut in or near Wetland Resource Areas shall be mitigated as follows (size refers to Diameter at Breast Height (DBH)):

1. Large trees (>10" DBH): the owner shall plant a native tree sapling (or two native shrubs) for each large tree cut.
2. Small trees (<10" DBH): For every small tree proposed to be cut, the owner shall plant one native tree sapling or one native shrub.

Mitigation Planting for Notice of Intent Applications

Unless otherwise constrained by site limitations, the same replacement ratios apply to all properties including but not limited to single-family, commercial, industrial, municipal, and multi-family residential properties. Should site constraints prevent adherence to the ratios, details of the constraints and an analysis of measures to avoid and minimize tree and shrub removal in areas subject to jurisdiction shall be provided.

The analysis shall include a narrative and a project plan identifying the location, species, and diameter of trees proposed for removal relative to wetland resource areas, the 100-foot buffer zone, proposed activities, and the limit of work. The plan shall also include enough information for the Commission to determine if there are other potential locations for tree and shrub replacement on the property within areas subject to jurisdiction. Projects are typically expected to replace no less than FIFTY percent of the trees and shrubs removed.

Replacement trees and shrubs incorporated into landscapes and hardscapes may be acceptable. A description of how the trees and shrubs are suitable for the anticipated use, location, and maintenance of the area shall be provided. For example, hard mast species such as oak, hickory, and beech may not be appropriate adjacent to parking areas because of falling acorns and nuts. Certain species may also not be tolerant of periodic salt from snow plowing. Considerations like these may reduce the need for replacement and desire to remove the trees or shrubs in the future.

Open Space Residential Subdivisions as defined in Section 4.8.2 of the Spencer Zoning Bylaw are not subject to this policy because of the open space requirements which inherently impose limits on clearing vegetation.

Replacement Tree/Shrub Requirements.

A replacement tree/shrub shall:

1. Be planted at least as close to the resource area as the cut tree closest to the wetlands that the new tree is replacing.
2. Be of a native species
3. Trees shall have a DBH of 2" or greater and at least 5-feet tall; shrubs shall be a 2-gallon pot or greater.

4. Optimize wildlife habitat value to the maximum extent practicable; and
5. Survive a minimum of two but a maximum of five growing seasons, at the discretion of the SCC or its agent. The owner must describe the steps that will be taken to maintain the tree for at least 24 months after the date that it is planted.
6. Shall serve the same or similar function of the tree being removed.

What is a Native Plant?

Native plants (also called indigenous plants) are plants that have evolved over thousands of years to adapt to the geography, hydrology, and climate of a particular region. As a result, native plants form communities with other plants that provide habitat for a variety of local wildlife species such as songbirds and butterflies.

Why Use Native Plants?

Because native plants are adapted to local conditions, they provide a beautiful, hardy, drought resistant, low maintenance landscape while benefiting the environment. Once established, they can save time and money by eliminating the need for fertilizers, pesticides, water, and lawn maintenance equipment.

Select the type of native plants.

When selecting plants, keep in mind the amount of light and water the location gets as well as the type of soil. A sunny, dry location with sandy soil will need different plants from a shady, wet one with acid soil. Also keep in mind plants that provide natural foods for wildlife such as fruits, seeds, nuts, and nectar. Please refer to **Appendix 1** for a partial list of acceptable native plants.

Submit a plan.

After selecting the plants, draw up a sketch plan at a scale of 1" =40'. You may use a plot plan printed from the Town of Spencer's "GIS Mapping": <https://spencerma.mapgeo.io/>

Please show approximately where the plants will go. Vegetation should be planted in a "naturalistic manner" (i.e. clumping, mini-communities, etc.).

Get Approval

Your re-planting plan shall be submitted with the Tree Removal Request Application and will either be approved by the Conservation Agent, the Conservation Commission, or will require a more formal application process through a formal Conservation Commission meeting. Please check with the Conservation Agent as to the status of your application and how long the process will take. Once your project is properly approved, you will receive a memo from the Conservation Agent or Clerk indicating that your tree cutting, and re-planting may proceed.

DOING THE WORK

Times to Plant

Planting is largely a late fall or early spring activity occurring at the beginning or end of the growing season. The growing season for Worcester County goes from April 26 – October 14. Planting in hot, dry summer conditions may delay seed germination and plant growth or require extensive watering.

As with any planting, watering may be necessary while the plants are becoming established, especially during a drought or heat wave. Watering seeded areas, however, is usually not

mandatory as native species will usually germinate when conditions are most appropriate. Mulch of dead leaves or compost helps to retain moisture in the soil for a young transplant. Fall plantings shall be done before the first frost which occurs sometime around October 14.

Planting trees and shrubs -Native plants are installed the same way as any other potted or bare root stock by digging a hole large enough so it will not constrict root systems. You will want to use proper tree planting procedures - to make sure the tree has the best chance for a long life.

- Dig the hole as deep as the root ball and twice as wide.
- Check to see if the soil around the hole is too hard - if it is, loosen it up a bit with the shovel.
- Remove the container from the root ball. The roots are like the plant's blood vessels, and they work best if they are not all twisted and knotted up, so you might need to straighten them out if they are circling around after having grown in the container.
- Place the tree in the hole, making sure the soil is at the same level on the tree as when the tree grew in the garden center. If your tree has burlap around the root ball, place the tree in the hole and then carefully untie the burlap. Leave the burlap lying in the bottom of the hole - this is okay - the burlap will simply turn into organic matter over a period of time.
- Fill in around the root ball with soil and pack the soil with your hands and feet to make sure that there are no air pockets.
- Make a little dam around the base of the plant as wide as the hole with left over soil or grass clumps to hold in the water.

MONITORING OF RESTORED AREA

Applications of fertilizers or pesticides shall not be used in wetland areas. Maintenance shall be limited to invasive species removal to maintain native plant diversity. It is the landowner's responsibility to replace trees and shrubs that do not survive.

By choosing native plants suited to the site conditions, little maintenance, chemical fertilizers, herbicides, or additional watering will be necessary for the plants to thrive. This all adds up to time and cost savings as well as a healthier habitat for you and the wildlife that inhabit your yard.