Defective and brittle trees are not the only hazards presented by vegetation in urban settings. Common sense combined with a little planning to plant the right tree in the right place can avoid these problems:

HEAVY FRUIT

Most trees will yield fruit of some kind, often creating an annoyance during some time of the year. Even a favorite street tree such as red oak can literally rain down acorns in a year of heavy production (every 2-3 year cycles). However, trees with large fruit can create more serious problems in parking lots and pedestrian areas and even be dangerous. Osage orange trees and Coulter or digger pine trees are obvious examples. Such trees are better suited for hillside stabilization or other more ‘natural’ sites.

THORNS

Trees like hawthorns, honeylocusts and some other species have large thorns that can be dangerous, especially to children. Although thorny species can be used strategically as hedges for privacy or to direct pedestrian traffic, under most circumstances it is best to use thornless cultivars or restrict such trees to natural areas.

LINE OF SIGHT OBSTRUCTION

Tree limbs that block stop signs or other traffic signs can create dangerous situations. Similarly, confers near streets or driveway intersections can block views and are difficult to remedy through pruning without destroying the appearance of the tree.

UTILITY LINES

Trees that reach into power lines when they mature are hazardous in at least two ways. They endanger the reliable delivery of electricity to buildings, and they potentially endanger children or other tree climbers into contact with deadly power lines. Even low-hanging branches can be a threat to power lines, causing a line to snap. A number of people have been electrocuted by touching an overhead line that has sagged enough to be reached. It is the duty of municipalities and property owners to perform risk assessments in order to prevent a hazardous situation such as shown here. Simple pruning will often suffice, and every effort should be made to prevent unnecessary tree removals.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For some excellent sources of additional information, please visit arborday.org/bulletins.

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THE TREE CITY USA PROGRAM IS SPONSORED BY THE Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. To achieve the national recognition of being named as a Tree City USA, a town or city must meet four standards:

Standard 1: A Tree Board or Department
Standard 2: A Tree Care Ordinance
Standard 3: A Community Forestry Program with an Annual Budget of at least $2 per capita
Standard 4: An Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation

Each recognized community receives a Tree City USA flag, plaque, and community entrance signs. Towns and cities of every size can qualify. Tree City USA application forms are available from your state forester, the Arbor Day Foundation at arborday.org/treecity or contact your state forestry agency.

It is the duty of municipalities and property owners to perform risk assessments in order to prevent a hazardous situation such as shown here. Simple pruning will often suffice, and every effort should be made to prevent unnecessary tree removals.

Not long after the new arborist arrived, trees began being felled and a “hit list” of others was presented to the faculty committee that oversaw such matters. Soon, the arborist was known as The Grim Reaper, a title out of character in a professorial setting. Scare tactics may backfire. The better approach is to learn to assess the setting, consider the risks and benefits, and care for our trees in a way that allows decision-makers to balance safety with the values that trees provide.

While the arborist’s intentions were good, his method was not. Instead of viewing every tree as a ‘hazard’ if it has a defect, ‘tree risk assessment’ takes into account the potential for failure and the potential for causing harm. Today, forms and decision criteria have been developed to guide the process of assessing risk and the website noted on page 8 provides more information that will help. Basically, the newer method of assessment moves away from labeling a tree a hazard or a safe tree. Instead, it attempts to quantify the risk of harm in a way that allows decision-makers to balance safety with the values that trees provide.

In this issue, some of the signs that warn about dangerous trees are presented, as well as a reminder that those of us who own or manage trees are, indeed, responsible for the safety of people and property in the vicinity of our trees. But you will find no photos of dented cars or smashed houses. Scape tactics may backfire. The better approach is to learn to analyze the setting, consider the risks and benefits, and carefully plan for actions that prevent or correct hazards whenever possible. It is toward that end that this issue is dedicated.