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When you flip a switch and your lights come on, you probably don’t give us a thought. We like it that way. It means everything is going as it should. But when your power is out, it can be annoying and restoring it can be dangerous for crews.

As beautiful as they are, as important as they are to the environment, trees growing near or into power lines are a danger and may cause power outages.

You have seen how storms and high winds causes branches to blow into or fall on lines and damage them. But the danger also stems from the fact that trees conduct electricity. When a tree comes in contact with a power line, it gives that electrical current a path to the ground, causing an interruption of power and making the tree a potential electrocution hazard to crews and the public.

The Vegetation Management Program

As we strive to provide the safe and reliable services you rely on, we often have to prune trees or remove trees, brush, and vines that might be a threat to power lines near your home.

We realize that pruning is not always the most popular or attractive solution. Like many, we would prefer to have all the lines run underground. But the cost to move existing lines underground, approximately $1 million per mile, would drive electric bills up.
considerably. Most new subdivisions are built with underground service, and we continue to promote that practice. However, there are thousands of miles of above-ground wires currently in use.

Our goals are to provide safe and reliable service while being as respectful of your trees as possible. It is a job that we take very seriously. We refined our Vegetation Management Program to improve customer communications and to be even more focused on balancing the beauty of trees with safety and reliability for our customers.

Our Vegetation Management Program seeks to prevent problems before they occur through an ongoing maintenance program. It takes three to four years for us to inspect and clear our entire 2,500-plus miles of lines, then we start all over again. If you are concerned about a tree growing near power lines, we would be pleased to have our Vegetation Management team come to your property and discuss options with you at any time.

GEC produced this guide to provide a comprehensive overview of our Vegetation Management Program, pruning guidelines, methods and practices, and how you, the customer, can be part of the process.
To bring reliable power to your neighborhood, now and in the future, we need your help. The best way to avoid having to prune trees to avoid contact with power lines is to plant the right tree in the right place. If you are planning to plant a tree in your yard, you can help reduce power outages for you and your neighbors by following these simple steps to smart landscaping.

1 **CHOOSE THE RIGHT TREE.**

Whether you are planting for beauty, privacy, or shade, there is a tree that will suit your purpose. Before making your selection, be sure to determine how tall and wide the tree will be at maturity and how deep the root system will be.

2 **CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPOT.**

Remember to look up to make sure you are clear of any power lines. Where you plant your tree is just as important as the type of tree you choose. (See the diagram on page 5 for sizes of trees that can be planted in the low, medium, and tall zones near electric lines.) Plan your spot based on the mature size of your tree to ensure there will
be enough clearance as it grows. A representative will be happy to discuss planting locations with you at no charge.

3 Call before you dig.

What you can’t see can hurt you! At least two business days before you dig, call 811 to have underground utilities marked for free. Dig-ins on underground utilities can be dangerous to you and to crews who must make repairs, and repairs are costly. Damage to the lines can also disrupt service to your entire neighborhood.
Tree Planting Zones

When planting a tree, follow these minimum safety maintenance zone guidelines keeping low-growing trees at least 25’ away from the maintenance zone, medium-growing trees at least 40’ and tall trees at least 60’ away.

Another consideration in landscaping when planting around pad-mounted transformers and equipment. Crews need safe access for routine maintenance or to restore power more quickly during outages.

If you prefer to hide your transformer behind landscaping or fencing, please keep everything six feet away from the front of the transformer and three feet away from the back and sides. That safety zone allows our crews the access they need for maintenance and power restoration. Allow room for plants to grow and still meet the clearance requirements above at maturity.

Crews may remove any obstructions within this safety zone during maintenance or outage repairs. GEC is not responsible for replacement of any obstructions that have to be removed.
Trees are an important part of the beauty of South Florida. We love their summer shade and lush splendor in the landscape. When trees grow near or into power lines, we must prune them to balance this environmental beauty with the safety and reliability our customers expect.

As your Cooperative, GEC is responsible for providing more than 18,000 services through more than 2,500 miles of electrical lines. To ensure safe, reliable service, we inspect and prune the entire system on a three to four year rotating schedule to identify trouble spots before they pose a risk of electrical danger or preventable power outages. Once we get through the entire system, we begin the cycle again.

Our crews check to see if trees, brush, or vines are growing within the standard safety maintenance zones. We prune to maintain a minimum clearance of ten feet above and below the distribution lines. We will remove limbs above that clearance if they are dead, diseased, or are otherwise a risk to our lines.

GEC does not normally prune trees or vegetation growing near home service lines. Those trees are your responsibility. For your safety, never prune a tree that is near or in contact with a utility line. Before you prune or hire a private tree service to prune near your service line,
please call GEC to schedule a time for us to temporarily remove the line at no charge while you or your contractor prune. Trees do conduct electricity and pose a serious electrocution hazard.

We have a full-time employee who manages the work of contract crews that are specially qualified to work near power lines and trained in the best tree-pruning practices. Providing in house supervision but using contract crews helps keep our program cost-efficient. GEC inspects contract crews to ensure it meets our standards and identify areas for improvement.

If you have questions or concerns while crews are working on your property, please feel free to speak with a crew member. He or she will be happy to answer your questions or to help you contact a representative. Please be cautious when approaching the work zone.

**How We Prune**

You can be assured we will do our best to preserve your tree’s health as we prune. Utility companies and arborists agree that the best way to prune trees for both the health of the tree and for maintaining electric service is the lateral pruning method. This method, used by all our crews, has been recommended by tree experts, the Arbor Day Foundation, and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

**Lateral Pruning**

Lateral pruning refers to cutting tree branches back to the lateral or “parent” limb. If there is no lateral, the branch may have to be cut back to the trunk of the tree
itself. Lateral pruning is healthier for the tree because it helps ensure that the tree’s natural defenses can seal the pruning cut and prevent the spread of disease or decay. Cutting a branch in the middle of its length, and not back to the lateral, means that dozens of fast-growing sprouts shoot out vertically from the cut opening up multiple avenues for disease and insects to enter the tree. It also means that repeat pruning will be required more often. Sometimes branches will need to be cut back beyond minimum clearance requirements to reach a lateral limb and protect the health of the tree.

Lateral pruning also strives to train the tree to grow away from electrical lines. This is because branches that are growing towards the lines are cut back to laterals that grow away from the power lines. This is how pruning helps redirect growth away from the lines.

GEC only considers pruning when trees are threatening power lines by growing into the standard safety maintenance zone. If your trees are not within this utility zone, we will not prune them.

To inhibit the growth of underbrush and vines around poles and lines, our certified contractors sometimes use a selective herbicide to control re-growth and re-sprouting of stumps.
If your tree must be pruned, you may request that GEC consider removing the tree instead, particularly if more than 25 percent of the tree’s canopy will be pruned in one growing season. This is a good option if you have a tree that will need extensive pruning or think you will be unhappy with the resulting shape of the tree. If the tree is unhealthy or unsound, you may also consider asking GEC about removing the tree. If you and GEC agree that it is better to remove the tree, GEC standard agreement calls for cutting the tree and removing the brush. Due to cost, GEC does not remove stumps, sawdust, or wood, but we will cut the trunk into manageable lengths for you.

GEC has an obligation to all our customers to maintain safe and reliable service. When tree pruning is necessary to accomplish that goal, we make every effort to consider our customer’s input and to accommodate requests that do not compromise safety and reliability. We encourage your input and questions, and invite you to take advantage of our crews in our Vegetation Management Program to determine the best way to keep trees and power lines apart.

If a situation comes up that we are unable to resolve on site or in discussions with our crews, we want you to know that you have somewhere to turn. Our Vegetation Management Representative will explore all options available for your specific issue and work with you to find a solution.
Go to www.gladesec.com, call 863-946-6200 or visit your local office to learn about other services provided by Glades Electric Cooperative.

**Budget Billing**

**Florida Rural Electric Credit Union**

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**Paperless Billing**