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### **Parkway plantings can put trees, gardeners at risk**

Property owners who see the parkways as fertile ground for their green thumbs may actually be putting the trees at risk – not to mention themselves. Digging on parkways can damage tree roots as well as utility lines that run from the streets into homes, including high-pressure natural gas lines.

Village ordinance governs the use of the parkways, which are the public property between private property boundaries and the public street. Most parkway planting rules, such as height restrictions to ensure driver and pedestrian sight lines, are linked to public safety and maintaining the health of the Village's urban forest.

Raised planters and piling mulch up against the trunks of parkway trees – or *volcano mulching* – is prohibited because of their harmful affect on healthy tree growth. The same goes for hard surfaces, such as pavers, railroad ties, timbers, fencing or other structures that can damage tree trunks and roots, create habitat for harmful insects and restrict proper root growth.

"Trees already have to overcome a lot to survive in an urban environment," said Village Forester Jim Semelka. "The effects of many of the most destructive practices like volcano mulching or planters may not be immediately evident. But they take their toll. Once the damage is done and a tree dies, it can take a decade or more for a new tree to become established and another decade to develop a good canopy."

Using fertilizers and pesticides on parkway plantings is prohibited as well since pedestrians and pets abound in our walkable community.

Parkways also are likely poor sites for anyone considering an urban vegetable garden. Given the winter road salt spray, ever-present vehicle exhaust and frequent use of parkways by the Villages more than 3,000 registered dogs and cats, most experts would say a raised garden in a back yard is a better site choice – especially since it also can be fenced in to keep out the rabbits, opossums and other wild animals that share the community.

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Parkway plantings  
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And should the Village or a public utility company need access to the sewer, water or natural gas lines that run beneath the parkways, any plantings are almost sure to be damaged beyond routine, basic restoration standards, according to Semelka.

Swings and holiday decorations are harmful to parkway trees as well. That's why it is illegal to attach ropes, wires, nails, signs, posters or any other object to trees and shrubs located on Village property. In addition to harming the tree, swinging in the parkway is a safety hazard as cars, pedestrians and bicyclists pass by within a few feet of the tree, Semelka said.

Any resident who wishes to plant something other than grass on the parkway adjacent to his or her property should contact the Village forester for guidance prior to purchasing plants or beginning to dig. Just call 708.358.5700 or e-mail [publicworks@oak-park.us](mailto:publicworks@oak-park.us).

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