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Before you clear: Bell County land clearing planning checklist

Planning checklist

For property owners in Temple and the rest of Bell County. Work down the page before asking for quotes.

1. The property and who regulates it

- ☐ Confirm whether the land is inside a city or village, or in unincorporated Bell County. Burn and tree rules change at the city line.
- ☐ Mark the area to clear on an aerial photo or plat, and measure it in acres or square feet.
- ☐ Write down what the land is for: pasture, a house pad, a drive, trails, a yard or a fence line. The finish you need sets the method.
- ☐ Check for creeks, draws, springs or mapped floodplain. Bell County floodplain permits are filed through the county's online permitting portal.
- ☐ Note any agricultural valuation. Changing the land's use can trigger a rollback tax for the three prior years; ask the appraisal district first.
- ☐ Check deed restrictions, HOA rules and any easements that cross the land.

2. Trees, wildlife and features that stay

- ☐ Flag every tree you want to keep, and keep machines off the ground under its drip line.
- ☐ Oaks: avoid wounding them from February through June, and paint any fresh wound right away, to limit oak wilt.
- ☐ Temple, I-35 corridor overlay: trees over 8 inches across in or within 300 feet of the floodplain are protected, and removed trees carry a replacement requirement or fee.
- ☐ Mature cedar mixed with oaks on shaded slopes may be golden-cheeked warbler habitat. Surveys only count from March 15 to June 1.
- ☐ Near Salado Creek and its springs, leave a buffer for the Salado salamander's habitat.
- ☐ Mark fences, wells, septic parts, water lines, survey pins and anything else that must survive the work, and note old wire or dumped debris hidden in the brush.

3. Burn and debris rules by jurisdiction

- ☐ Temple: outdoor burning of brush and trees is banned. A land-clearing burn is allowed only when no practical alternative exists, with a Fire Marshal permit first. Professional tree trimmers register with the city and haul cuttings to the landfill.
- ☐ Belton: an open burn permit is required at all times, with a fee and a Fire Marshal inspection before burning.
- ☐ Salado: burning by village permit only, with limits on pile size, fire breaks, distance from buildings, wind and burning hours.
- ☐ Killeen, Harker Heights and other cities: burn and tree rules confirmed per address with the city.
- ☐ Unincorporated Bell County: landowners may burn trees and brush cleared from the same property unless a county burn ban is in place. Natural vegetation only; report burns to the county burn line, 254-933-5555.
- ☐ Everywhere: no tires, plastics, rubber, lumber or treated wood in any pile.
- ☐ Emerald ash borer quarantine: ash wood in any form and all hardwood firewood stay in the quarantined area.
- ☐ Temple Landfill: loads must be tarped, and non-residents pay a per-load charge.

4. Utilities and 811

- ☐ Request a Texas811 locate no earlier than 14 days and no later than 48 hours ahead, not counting weekends and holidays, before any machine digs 16 inches or deeper: grubbing, root plowing or deep stump work.
- ☐ Mark overhead lines, and call the electric provider about trees touching or leaning into them before any work nearby.
- ☐ Note private water lines, electric to wells and barns, and septic fields that a locate ticket will not show.

5. Ground, weather and erosion

- ☐ East of I-35, the black clay ruts when wet. Expect waits after soaking rain; May, September and October are the wettest months.
- ☐ West of I-35, expect rock near the surface on the stony limestone soils.
- ☐ Plan cover for every patch of bare soil before the next heavy rain: mulch, seed, straw or silt fence on the low edge.
- ☐ Construction disturbing an acre or more falls under the TCEQ construction stormwater permit and needs a stormwater pollution prevention plan.
- ☐ Agree on the finish: stumps at grade, ground below grade, or pulled with root balls. Mesquite must be grubbed about 14 inches deep or it resprouts.
- ☐ If you are building, remember that clearing is not grading; the pad still needs fill, compaction and drainage.

6. Comparing quotes

- ☐ The area to be cleared, measured the same way on each quote.
- ☐ The method named: forestry mulching, clearing and grubbing, selective clearing or shredding.
- ☐ The finish level, stated plainly: what happens to stumps and roots.
- ☐ Where the debris goes, and whether haul-off, disposal or burn permits are included.
- ☐ Which trees stay, and how they are protected during the work.
- ☐ Who requests the 811 locate and any permits.
- ☐ Erosion control after the work: what is included and what is extra.
- ☐ Anything excluded, such as grading, seeding, fence repair, herbicide or rock work.
- ☐ How rain days, rescheduling and hidden debris are handled.
- ☐ Proof of insurance for whoever does the work.

Rules and requirements change. Confirm anything that matters to your project with the city, village, county or agency named above. Arcady Temple Land Clearing offers and manages land clearing across Temple and the rest of Bell County, with the work done by independent, insured clearing contractors.

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Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm; Saturday and Sunday, 9am to 2pm. Outside these hours, emergency calls only. Central time.