Activity Risk Assessment – Laurel Removal

Bristol Parks and Green Spaces Volunteer Programme

Date: November 2026

If this risk assessment is relevant to your work session it must be identified on your site risk assessment. These hazards must be reassessed before an activity takes place.

Hazard	Possible Outcome	Who is at risk?	Control measures	Risk rating	Person responsible
Handling laurel	Contact with leaves, sap and cut material; irritation or allergic reaction	Volunteers supervising staff	Wear gloves, long sleeves and long trousers. Avoid touching face and eyes. Wash hands before eating and at the end of the session. Provide water and soap or antibacterial hand wipes.	Low	Session leader
Using hand tools	Secateurs, loppers and pruning saws; cuts and punctures	Volunteers; staff; nearby people	Carry out tool and site talk. Demonstrate safe use. Use the correct tool for the material. Inspect tools and remove damaged equipment. Maintain safe working distances. Cut from stable ground, keep hands clear of blades, close or sheath tools when carrying and stop if a cut needs excessive force.	Medium	Session leader
Cutting branches	Falling, flicking or springing branches; eye or impact injury	Volunteers; staff; nearby people	Wear eye protection. Cut branches in manageable sections. Check tension in stems. Maintain exclusion zones. Ground-level hand-tool pruning only. No felling or overhead cutting. Stop and refer hung-up, heavily tensioned or uncontrolled stems to the Parks Operations team. Session leader to set and enforce separation distances appropriate to each cut.	Medium	Session leader

Moving and dragging brash	Strains, scratches, trips and falls	Volunteers ; staff	Cut material into manageable sizes. Work in pairs when moving larger branches. Keep work area tidy and access routes clear. Stack no higher than waist height, and lower if needed for stability.	Mediu m	Session leader
Working on uneven ground	Hidden stumps, holes and vegetation; slips, trips and falls	Volunteers ; staff	Inspect site before work. Highlight hazards during briefing. Wear suitable footwear. Maintain awareness when carrying materials. Session leader to mark or exclude unsafe ground and new cut stumps; maintain clear walking routes. Stop if footing becomes unsafe.	Mediu m	Session leader
Working in dense vegetation	Reduced visibility; hidden hazards or contact with tools	Volunteers ; staff	Establish clear work zones and communication. Avoid overcrowding. Use a buddy system where visibility is limited. Session leader to maintain effective supervision. Do not cut towards people; stop cutting if anyone enters the work zone or communication is lost.	Mediu m	Session leader
Handling stems, logs and roots	Manual handling; back injury, strain and fatigue	Volunteers ; staff	Avoid excessive loads. Take breaks. Use wheelbarrows or moving aids where available. Use team handling where appropriate. No stump/root excavation or heavy log handling under this assessment. Leave oversized material for separately planned removal.	Mediu m	Session leader
Working near banks/slo pes	Unstable footing, falls and rolling material	Volunteers ; staff; people below	Assess slopes before work. Use stable positions and avoid overreaching. Steep/unstable banks excluded. Do not work directly above/below others; stop if footing or brash cannot be controlled.	Mediu m	Session leader
Vegetatio n clearance	Disturbing wildlife, nests or protected species	Wildlife; volunteers ; staff	Check for nesting birds and protected species before work. Stop immediately if active nests or protected species are found and seek advice. Session leader to arrange checks with the Ranger/nature conservation officer and confirm timing and any restrictions before starting. Do not resume affected work until advice is obtained.	Low	Session leader
Inspecting /clearing vegetation	Hidden litter, needles, glass or waste; cuts and contamination	Volunteers Staff	Inspect area before work. Do not handle sharps directly. Follow council sharps procedures. Session leader to isolate suspect waste and arrange authorised removal. Volunteers must not reach blindly into vegetation. Confirm the applicable council procedure and reporting contact before the session.	Mediu m	Session leader
Sustained cutting and clearing	Physical exertion and fatigue; reduced concentration	Volunteers ; staff	Schedule breaks, encourage hydration and rotate tasks. Monitor for fatigue. Session leader to match work to capability, agree adjustments privately where needed and stop/reallocate tasks when safe working cannot be maintained.	Low	Session leader

Stacking brash	Unstable piles, trips and rolling material	Volunteers; staff; public	Designate a stacking area. Stack neatly and keep access routes clear. Consider slope angle and prevent material rolling or washing downhill. Single limit: no higher than waist height, lower where stability requires. Session leader to agree a stable location away from paths and access points.	Medium	Session leader
Authorising sessions	Lone or unapproved work; delayed assistance and unsafe methods	Volunteers; staff	Laurel removal is not a lone volunteer activity. Undertake as a planned group activity with an approved risk assessment and advance Parks Operations Coordinator authorisation. Named session leader to brief and supervise the group, record attendance and prevent work outside agreed limits.	Medium	Session leader
Handling plant material and waste	Accidental ingestion; inappropriate waste processing	Volunteers; staff; public; animals	Do not eat plant material. Keep food separate and wash hands before eating. Seek medical advice promptly if ingestion is suspected.	Medium	Session leader
Separating work from public access	People entering cutting or handling areas; impact/cuts	Public; volunteers; staff	Session leader to assess nearby paths and access points. Pause work whenever someone enters the exclusion area. Any path closure must be authorised before use.	Medium	Session leader
Responding to injury or illness	Delayed first aid or emergency access	Volunteers; staff; public	Before starting, session leader to record emergency arrangements, exact site location/access point, working phone/coverage and a backup communication plan. Brief the group. Stop work if arrangements are unavailable. Call 999 for an emergency and send someone to guide responders where safe.	Medium	Session leader
Working outdoors	High winds, adverse weather and unsafe footing	Volunteers; staff; public	Cease work during high winds or other adverse weather that increases falling-branch or footing risks. Session leader to check conditions before and during work, agree shelter/welfare arrangements and stop for unsafe weather, poor visibility or ground conditions. Reassess before restarting.	Medium	Session leader