

Hiring an Arborist

Tips for selecting a tree care professional

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Ornamental trees not only make a home more beautiful, they can increase the worth of a property by up to 15 percent. Trees are truly assets that need to be enhanced and protected. It is very difficult and costly, if not impossible, to repair damage done to a tree by poor pruning. In tree work, the old adage “you get what you pay for” is very true. A qualified and reputable individual or firm should be hired to perform tree work.

The following suggestions will help you to enhance and protect your trees.

1. Check in the telephone directory under *Trees* or *Tree Service*. Although anyone can list themselves in the yellow pages, a listing at least indicates some degree of permanence.
2. Beware of door-knockers, who are especially common after storms when non-professionals see a chance to earn some quick money. Often, storm damage creates high risk situations for both workers and homeowners, and there is opportunity for even more damage to trees and shrubs if work is not done correctly.
3. Never let yourself be rushed by bargains and never pay in advance.
4. Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage (such as your house and your neighbor's) and workman's compensation. Then call the insurance company to see if the policy is current. Under some circumstances you can be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property or damage is done to a neighbor's property.
5. Ask for local references, such as other jobs the company or individual has done. Take a look at the work and, if possible, talk with the former client. Experience, education, and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.
6. Determine if the arborist is a member of organizations such as the National Arborist Association or the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Membership does not guarantee quality, but lack of membership may cast doubt on the person's professionalism.

7. Many qualified arborists have passed a test and been certified as arborists by the ISA. This program is available to arborists nationwide. If possible, include a certified arborist in those whom you contact to examine your tree. Contact the Community Forestry Office for a list of certified arborists in Alaska.

8. Ask more than one arborist to give you written estimates. Don't blindly accept the lowest bid; a good job may be slightly more expensive.

9. A good arborist will offer a wide range of services, such as pruning, cabling and bracing, pest control, etc.

10. A good arborist will very rarely recommend topping a tree. This practice makes a tree susceptible to insects, disease, and decay. It may cause the tree to be hazardous, and it is ugly.

11. A conscientious arborist will not use climbing spikes if the tree is to remain in the landscape.

12. Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal should be a last resort.

Pruning should be done by tree care professionals, not by individuals with chain saws trying to make a fast buck. Take the time to find and hire a professional arborist who will provide high quality work at a fair price. Good tree care today means lower costs and a healthier, safer, and more attractive tree in the future.

(Information taken from *Tree City USA Bulletin #6*, 1992 “How to Hire an Arborist,” National Arbor Day Foundation, and “Urban Forestry News,” a newsletter of the Pennsylvania Urban & Community Forestry Council.