

# HIRING A TREE CARE SERVICE

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Hiring a tree care service is an important decision. If your trees are in need of pruning or fertilizing, have suffered weather-related damage, or require shaping or removal, you may benefit from the work of an arborist or tree care specialist.



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## Training, Insurance, and Liability

Tree care work is among the most dangerous jobs in the United States and should only be performed by those trained and equipped to work safely. Poorly implemented tree work can be deadly to tree workers. Workers can fall, be struck by branches, be electrocuted in power lines, get pulled into chippers, or cut with saws.

When hiring a tree service, ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage and worker's compensation. Then contact the insurance company to make sure that the policy is current. In some circumstances, you can be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property or if the worker damages a neighbor's property.

## Professional Organizations and Certifications

Consider companies whose arborists are members of professional organizations such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), or the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA). Members of professional associations have access to continuing education opportunities and are likely to be up-to-date on current tree care practices and procedures. Membership in these and other professional organizations does not guarantee quality, but it does indicate professional commitment.

Ask if the company employs ISA Certified Arborists or ASCA Registered Consulting Arborists. These professionals have established their knowledge and competence in the art and science of planting, caring for, and maintaining trees.

## Consulting and Full-Service Arborists

Full-service arborists are professionals who possess skills in planting, transplanting, pruning, fertilizing, pest management, disease diagnosis, tree removal, and stump grinding. Consulting arborists are experts who offer advice, but do not perform services. They specialize in tree appraisals, diagnosing problems, and recommending treatments.

Consider hiring an independent certified or consulting arborist before contracting for a service. This will provide some protection from unnecessary tree removal or paying for services that are not needed.

Beautiful, healthy trees reduce heating and cooling costs, add value to the property, and have many social and ecological benefits. Conversely, poorly maintained trees can be a liability or even a hazard. Poorly trained workers can damage and disfigure trees, triggering the tree's death spiral. Hiring good tree care is well worth a fair price.

## Tips for Selecting a Tree Care Company:

- Ask for references and get recommendations from others. Take a look at some of the work, and if possible, talk with former clients. Experience, education, and a good reputation are signs of good tree care.
- Get contracts in writing. Ask the tree care company to create a specific contract for work, including all costs and tasks associated with the work and when it will be done. The contract should include the responsibility for cleanup and disposal of tree wood residue. If you want to have more work done, ask for an hourly rate.
- Check with your municipality to determine if you need a permit or license. Be sure to comply with all local, state, or national laws that govern tree care.
- Have more than one company look at the job and give written estimates.
- Do not feel obligated to pay in full until the work is completed. Keep in mind that terms for residential tree work are usually “due on delivery,” and work may not proceed unless you are there to pay.

## Beware of:

- People who knock on doors and offer tree trimming or removal. Door-knockers are especially common after storms, when nonprofessionals seize the opportunity. Often, storm damage creates high-risk situations for both workers and homeowners.
- Estimates that fall well below the average. At best, very low estimates indicate inexperience, as the true cost of doing business is not likely covered. There may be other hidden costs. This can be a strong indicator that the person is not fully trained or insured.
- Companies that are not listed in the phone book and have no website. Although anyone can list themselves in the yellow pages or create a website, a listing at least indicates an intent to stay in business.
- Companies who promise a discount if you sign an agreement now. Be sure you understand what work is to be done for what amount of money.
- Workers who are eager to remove trees. Removal should be the last resort.

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