

How to hire an arborist



Hiring a tree care specialist deserves all the consideration and caution that goes into selecting a banker or home builder. The right choice can assure health, beauty and longer life for your trees.

■ **let your fingers do the walking** Check in the phone directory, usually under Arborists or Tree Service. Although anyone can list themselves in the yellow pages, a listing at least indicates some degree of permanence.

■ **what's your hurry?** Never let yourself be rushed by bargains ("If you sign an agreement today, I can take ten percent off the price ..."). Never pay in advance.

■ **look, listen and learn** Ask for local references — other jobs the company or individual has done. Take a look at some, and if possible, talk with the former client. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.

■ **knock-knock who's there** Beware of door knockers. Most reputable companies have all the work they can handle without going door-to-door. Door-knockers 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.

■ **let's see some I.D.** 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 phone the insurance company to make certain 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!

■ **leave your spikes at home** A conscientious arborist will not use climbing spikes if the tree is to remain in the landscape.

For more information, contact

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■ **an arborist for all seasons** A good arborist will offer a wide range of services (pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, lightning protection, pest control, etc.).

■ **licensed to prune** Find out if the arborist is certified through a state certification program or the International Society of Arboriculture. ISA's program is available to arborists nationwide and requires appropriate training, experience and knowledge as evidenced by successfully completing a standardized application and testing process. In some cities, arborists are required to have a license. Check with city hall, then use only an arborist who is in compliance if licensing is included in your community's ordinances.

■ **remember membership** Determine if the arborist is a member of any organizations, such as the American Forestry Association, the American Society of Consulting Arborists, the International Society of Arboriculture or the National Arborist Association. Membership does not guarantee quality, but lack of membership casts doubt on the person's professionalism.

■ **you'd better shop around** Have more than one arborist look at your job and give you estimates. Don't expect one to lower a bid to match another's, and be willing to pay for the estimate if necessary; but two or more opinions and cost estimates are worth your extra effort.

■ **stop the top** Avoid tree services that routinely top trees. Topping damages a tree's looks and health, eventually killing it. A good arborist can provide alternatives to topping that will keep the tree healthy, so it can be enjoyed for many years to come.

■ **eager beaver** Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal clearly should be a last resort.

TWELVE TIPS



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