

How to Hire a Tree Expert

What Tree Experts Do

Tree experts, known as Arborists, provide a variety of services to help you care for the valuable investment you have made in your trees. An arborist can determine what type of pruning is necessary to maintain or improve the health, appearance, and safety of your trees. These techniques include:

- Identifying and removing diseased, insect-infested, damaged, and dead limbs.
- Eliminating branches that rub each other.
- Removing limbs that interfere with wires, buildings, sidewalks, streets or obstruct views.
- Selectively removing branches to create better tree structure.

Although removal is a last resort, it is recommended when the tree is:

- dead or dying
- considered irreparably hazardous
- causing an obstruction that is impossible to correct through pruning
- to be replaced by a more suitable tree

Selecting an Arborist

Look for a combination of education, experience, certifications, licenses, and references. Beware of people soliciting work door to door without identification on their vehicle, uniform or I.D. card. Get a written estimate and always confirm insurance and references.

Insurance Request to have a certificate of insurance (including proof of liability for personal and property damage) sent to you directly from the insurance agent. This does not cost either party any money. Be sure to call the insurance company to verify that the policy is current, even if the certificate has not expired. 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.

References Ask for and verify local references. Visit and inspect some of their work. Talk to previous clients. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.

Certifications Ask for proof of membership in professional organizations and professional certifications. Certification does not guarantee high quality work, but it does demonstrate a basic level of professional capability and commitment to the field.

Permit Some Cities, such as the City of Sacramento, can require a permit, based on the tree species and size. Please check your City and County ordinances for requirements.

Resources

International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) *Treesaregood.org*

Certification requires a broad basic knowledge of tree biology, species identification and selection, soils and tree nutrition, planting, pruning, problem diagnosis and management. It also requires 18 months of experience in Arboriculture and 30 hours of continuing education every three years. From the ISA website you may enter your zip code or city and obtain a list of certified arborists in your area.

The American Society of Consulting Arborists *asca-consultants.org*

Membership is for practicing arborists who specialize in advising, diagnosing, recommending treatments, making appraisals and offering legal testimony in court. Signifies a high degree of professionalism in arboriculture. Requires academic foundation, extensive work experience, professional affiliations, and references.

Estimates Have more than one arborist give you an estimate. You may be required to pay for the estimate but two or more opinions are worth your extra effort. Remember that pruning is an art. The arborist's skill and professionalism may be more important than low bid.

Responsible Practices While some arborists are not equipped to service every aspect of every job, a good arborist can advise and direct in all areas of tree care (pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, lightning protection, pest control, etc.). If reducing the height of the tree is a goal, a good arborist will use ISA recommended techniques. They will not simply chop off the top of the tree at the desired height. Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal should be a last resort.

Contract A contract is the key to preventing misunderstandings and assuring the work is performed to the standards you expect. Most companies have their own forms, and conditions vary widely. Read the document carefully and check with your attorney if you have questions. There are several key items that a contract should include:

- 1) The date that work is to begin and end.
- 2) Exactly what work will be done. For example, "Prune all dead, dying, diseased and weak branches 1.5 inches or greater in diameter."
- 3) Specify that the work will be done according to the International Society of Arboriculture, Pruning Standards, ANSI 300 and the ANSI Z133.1, 1988 Safety Standards.
- 4) If your tree is to be sprayed, get a written statement detailing the specific insect or disease to be treated, the chemical to be used and how much, and what you need to do (cover lawn furniture, keep pets inside, etc.).
- 5) If fertilizing is to be done, specify type, amount and method of application. A rough map of the property identifying trees to be serviced, or a clearly written description of location.
- 6) Specify what clean-up work will be done and when.
- 7) Clarify who will get any firewood, and if it is for you, will it be cut into 16 inch lengths and stacked.
- 8) Clarify if removal of tree includes grinding out the stump and surface roots to one foot below grade + filling with topsoil.
- 9) What is the absolute total dollar amount you will be charged? Leave no room for confusion over whether the price is per tree or for the whole job. Work is usually priced as a single fee for the whole job or on an hourly basis plus materials. When using the latter, be sure to include the wording, "but not to exceed"...