



# FactSheet

Extension

## Ohio State University Fact Sheet

### Horticulture and Crop Sciences

2001 Fyffe Court, Columbus, OH 43210-1096

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## How to Hire an Arborist

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The services of an arborist may be required if a tree is in need of pruning, fertilizing, weather-related damage assessment, or other problem diagnosis. The homeowner should have an idea of what needs to be done to a tree before hiring an arborist. 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.

### Tips for Selecting an Arborist

- Check in the phone directory, usually under "Tree Service." Although anyone can list themselves in the yellow pages, a listing at least indicates some degree of permanence.
- Beware of door-knockers, who are especially common after storms, when nonprofessionals see a chance to earn some quick money. Often, storm damage creates high risk situations for both workers and homeowners, and the opportunity for more damage to trees and shrubs if work is not done correctly.
- Never be rushed by bargains. Never pay in advance.
- Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage (such as your house and your neighbor's) and worker's compensation. Phone the insurance company to verify current policy information.
- Ask for local references of jobs the company or individual has done. Take a look at some, and if possible, talk with the former client.
- Determine if the arborist is a member of any professional association(s). Membership does not guarantee quality, but lack of membership may cast doubt on the person's professionalism.
- If inquiring about a company, ask if they employ certified arborists.
- The International Society of Arboriculture consists of individuals who have demonstrated their skills and have been recognized nationally.\*
- Have more than one certified arborist look at the job and give estimates. Don't expect one to lower a bid to match another's and be willing to pay for the estimate if necessary. Two or three opinions and cost estimates are worth the extra effort.
- A good arborist will offer a wide range of services such as pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, lightning



protection, and pest/disease control.

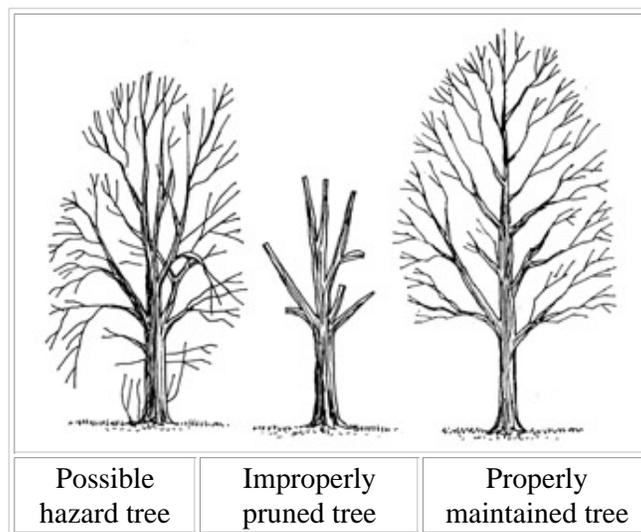
- A good arborist will recommend topping a tree only under rare circumstances, such as to save the tree after severe physical damage to the crown, or for the decorative effect of pollarding in a formal setting or restricted space. Pollarding is a severe form of heading that produces knobs at the ends of branches.
- Beware of arborists who offer to service trees in curb lawns. The trees may be the responsibility of the local tree authority.
- A conscientious arborist will not use climbing spikes if the tree is to remain in the landscape.
- Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal clearly should be the last resort.

## Price

Reputable arborists have made large investments in equipment and training. Trucks, hydraulic booms, chippers, sprayers, stump cutters and chain saws represent major capital investments and maintenance costs. Labor, insurance, safety training and continuing education add to the overhead. The price charged for a job reflects all these costs as well as a reasonable margin of profit. Work is usually priced one of two ways: as a single price for the job; or on an hourly basis plus materials. Remember that pruning is an art. The arborist's skill and professionalism may be more important than a low bid.

### Ways to save on the cost of tree care:

- Schedule work well in advance. Allowing the company to plan for your work may provide an opportunity to save on cost.
- Talk with neighbors about tree maintenance needs on their properties. An arborist may be interested in a group job over smaller individual jobs.



Note: ISA offers various membership categories for professionals, students, and interested lay citizens. ISA promotes the improvement of arboriculture among its members and the public, sponsors research, produces educational materials and maintains a computerized information service.

International Society of Arboriculture  
P. O. Box 908  
Urbana, IL 61801

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A list of certified arborists in the United States is available on the Internet. The list can be sorted by Zip Code or state. The World Wide Web address for this list is: <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx> Information taken from: The National Arbor Day Foundation, Tree City USA Bulletin No. 6, "How to Hire an Arborist," 100 Arbor Avenue, Nebraska City, NE 68410.

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