



Selecting a Tree Care Professional

Homeowners, property managers, and everyone working with plants can greatly extend the life and health of trees by practicing good gardening and maintenance techniques. Some tree maintenance jobs, however, are best handled by professionals.

Arborists are specialists in the care of individual trees. Arborists have the proper equipment, skills, and training to do work in large trees, around power lines, and at heights. Hiring an arborist should be a careful and detailed procedure. Safe and proper tree care is important not only as an investment but to minimize injuries and liability and extend the use and beauty of trees.

An arborist can provide services that include pruning, removal of entire trees, emergency tree care, root pruning, and cabling or bracing of branches. Many arborists also provide recommendations on tree selection and planting, fertilizer application, and insect and disease control.

How do you find an arborist? Check the Yellow Pages of the phone book under "Tree Service" or "Arborists."

How do you select a qualified arborist? Anyone can trim trees. Qualified and trained arborists, however, follow a set of professional, legal, and ethical guidelines.

1. Verify that the tree company is licensed. In Hawaii, arborists should hold a C-27 B license.

2. Ask if there is an International Society of Arborists (ISA)-certified arborist in the company, and whether the tree workers are certified by ISA. Voluntary certification of arborists is self-regulated to maintain standards of competence and up-to-date knowledge in the science and art of tree care. Certified arborists and tree workers must pass written and field tests to prove their knowledge and skills.

3. Ask for proof of insurance. Insurance should include personal and property damage coverage, as well

as workers' compensation. General liability coverage should be no less than \$1 million per occurrence. Hiring underinsured or uninsured workers could result in your personal responsibility for damages and injuries.

4. Request references from other, similar work done by the company. Always check the references, and, when possible, visit some of those sites. This is an important step. Would you buy a car sight unseen?

5. Unless you know or are comfortable with the arborist or the company, get more than one estimate. Do not always take the low bid. Check the credentials and the written specifications accompanying the bid or estimate. Determine the best combination of price, work to be done, skill, and professionalism.

6. Get it in writing. There should be a written, detailed contract specifying the work to be done and the cost. It is wise to include start and completion dates. Determine who is responsible for cleanup and disposal. Ascertain that the company has the proper tools and manpower to complete the job. Ask other questions.

Use caution and common sense. Be wary of door-to-door bargains for tree work. Most professionals will not operate on this basis, and choosing a nonprofessional can prove costly, dangerous, and ugly. Insist on proper and approved techniques. Some examples of unacceptable practices are tree topping, excess removal of live wood, and removing or disfiguring living trees without good cause.

Invest some initial time before you spend money, to be sure you obtain the best possible care for your trees. The result will be trees that are healthy, long-living, and increasingly valuable.

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