

# How to Hire an Arborist

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 always 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 (especially common after storms.) Non-professionals see an opportunity to earn some quick money, but often, storm damage creates high-risk situations for both workers and homeowners. This risk can be compounded if work is not done carefully and 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 recently. Visit the sites and if possible, talk with the former client.
- Determine if the arborist is a member of any professional associations. 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; be willing to pay for the estimate, if necessary. Two or three opinions and cost estimates are worth the extra effort and expense.
- A good arborist will offer a wide range of services such as pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, lightning protection, and pest/disease control.
- 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.

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

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\* A list of certified arborists in the United States is available on the internet. The list can be searched and sorted by several criteria. The World Wide Web address for this list is <http://www.aguiuc.edu/~isa/arborists/arborist.html>

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