

TIPS ON HIRING A PROFESSIONAL ARBORIST

Arborists are those folks you call when your trees require care. The telephone book may list them as "Tree Services" or "Tree Surgeons." However, looking around most cities, it seems there are more wood butchers than tree surgeons practicing as arborists.

How do you select a person or company to properly care for your trees? Calling several tree care services and asking questions is the best place to start. The following tips and pointed questions to ask can help you narrow the field to the elite group of folks worthy of the title "Professional Arborist."

Big tree work costs big money. However, where big trees are concerned, safety should guide in selecting an arborist. He should not only be properly insured, licensed, and trained to perform the dangerous work of tree trimming, but his activities should benefit the health of the tree and safety of those that live in the tree's shadow. Also remember that trees can contribute up to 15% of your property value. Consider professional tree care an investment.

Ask these questions of an arborist to see if you are dealing with a professional:

- **Will the work be performed under the supervision of a Certified Arborist?**

Many training certifications exist but one is nationally recognized and regionally administered: The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist. While hiring a certified arborist is not a guarantee of the best in tree care, you can be assured that the arborist has been examined in areas of tree biology, nutrition and fertilization, identification, safety and climbing, pruning, diagnosis, and treatment.

- **What specific service does your firm perform?**

Tree pruning, removal, and stump grinding may head most lists of services. Fertilizing and pest spraying may also be included. Make sure clean-up services are included that will leave your property neat when the job is done.

- **Are you familiar with ANSI A300 pruning standards?**

The arborist should be able to explain standard, hazard, crown reduction, and fine pruning techniques. You are dealing with a non-professional if they mention "topping" trees to remove hazards; go to your next prospect!

- **Do you have proof of Liability and Workmen's Compensation Insurance as well as an Occupational License?**

If so, make sure you get a copy of each before signing any contracts. Make sure all dates are current.

- **Do you use pruning paint?**

Pruning paint is not recommended and provides no benefits.

- **Do you use climbing spikes on live trees and palms?**

If the answer is "Yes," you are not talking to a professional arborist. Go to your next prospect.

- **Can you identify some of my trees?**

Any competent arborist should be able to identify most trees in the county by common and scientific names.

More questions to ask ...

- **May I have three local client references, with telephone numbers, and the approximate time you performed tree work for them?**

Any hesitancy to give you this information is a red flag! Once you get references, follow up on them: call the landowner, look at the trees that were trimmed. would you like your trees to look like that?

- **Could you give me a brief description of your formal training and practical experience?**

A professional arborist will be proud of his background. While formal college level courses are not always necessary, a display of continuing education courses is evidence of a strong desire for professional enhancement.

- **What equipment do you have to complete the job?**

If the arborist includes safety equipment, such as hard hats, goggles, gloves, and chainsaw chaps, you are dealing with a professional.

CHECKLIST OF TIPS:

- ✓ Certified Arborist
- ✓ Proof of insurance
- ✓ Proof of Occupational License
- ✓ No topping trees, use of climbing spikes on trees to remain, and no pruning paint
- ✓ A complete written itemized cost estimate of all services recommended
- ✓ A formal contract form for review before signing
- ✓ Evidence of continuing tree care education
- ✓ How long will the work take?
- ✓ Debris clean-up included in price?
- ✓ Can you get any firewood and will it be cut and stacked?
- ✓ Removal of tree includes stump grinding
- ✓ Tree workers are trained to work around power lines

Safety, aesthetics, and the long-term health of your trees come together when you hire a professional arborist. Don't take the task lightly; screen your applicants carefully; demand quality work.

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