



SELECTING A TREE SERVICE COMPANY

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Each year during the dormant period, homeowners are presented with an excellent opportunity to determine the pruning needs of their trees. For the deciduous varieties, the absence of leaves reveals the structure of the tree and readily shows where there are limb problems. How to correct those problems is usually the first order of business.

For homeowners with both the equipment and the knowledge to do pruning themselves, the work can begin when time is available and the weather is cooperating. For the vast majority of homeowners, without the skills and the necessary tools, we must rely on hiring someone.

While we may start by looking for a tree service company, what we are really looking for is an arboriculturist, commonly called an arborist. An arborist is a person who makes a career of caring for trees in the urban forest. If you find an arborist who has his own tree service company or is employed by them, you've found the kind of professional that can best meet your needs.

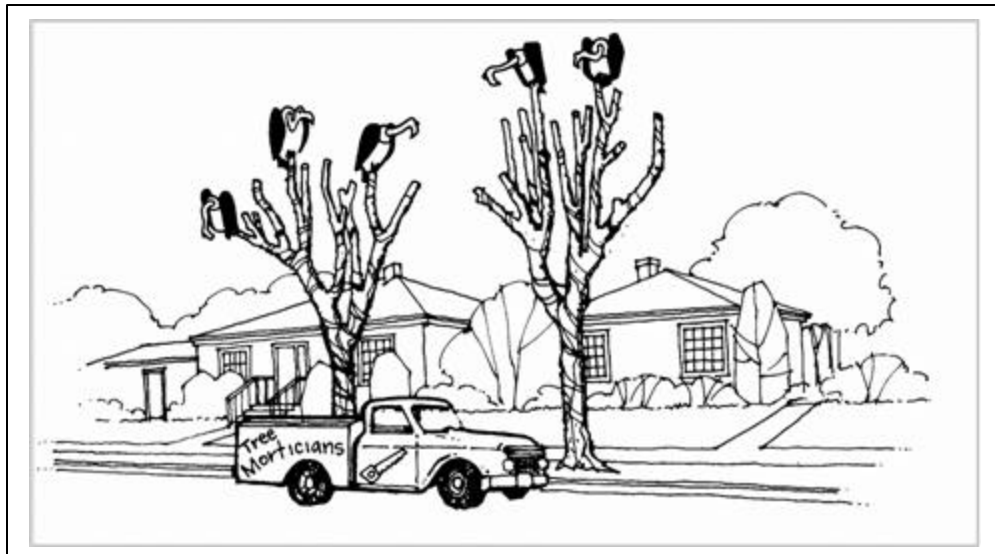
Choosing a tree service company should not be done haphazardly. In fact, one should choose such a company with the same caution used in choosing an architect, a home builder, or a mortgage company. In all these areas, a mistake tends to be long-lasting, but in the case of trees, a right choice can assure homeowners of beauty and longer life for their trees.

The International Society of Arboriculture has listed tips for selecting an arborist; steps that will save you money and help you avoid hiring the wrong tree service company. Read these tips carefully before hiring.

1. Check in the phone directory, usually under Trees, Tree Service, or Tree Care Service. Although anyone can list themselves in the yellow pages, a listing at least indicates some degree of permanence
2. Beware of "door-knockers." Most reputable companies have all the work they can handle without going door-to-door. Door-knockers are especially common after storms when non-professionals see the chance to earn

some quick money. Often, storm damage creates high risk situations for both workers and homeowners, and there is an opportunity for even more damage to trees and shrubs if the work is not done correctly.

3. Never let yourself be rushed by bargains - "If you sign an agreement today, I can take ten percent off the price." Remember, you get what you pay for! Also, never pay in advance.
4. Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage (such as your house and your neighbor's), and workman's compensation. Then phone the insurance company to make certain the policy is current.
5. Ask for local references - other jobs the company or an individual has worked for. Take a look at these, and if possible talk with the former clients. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.
6. Determine if the arborist is a member of any organizations like the American Forestry Association, American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA), International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and the National Arborist Association (NAA). Membership does not guarantee quality, but lack of membership casts doubt on the person's professionalism.
7. Have more than one arborist look at your job and give you estimates. Don't expect one to lower a bid to match another's and be willing to pay for an estimate if necessary. Two or more opinions and cost estimates are worth the extra effort.



Prunes as bad as he parks!

8. A good arborist will offer a wide range of services such as pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, and pest control.
9. A good arborist will not indiscriminately top (butcher) a tree. A good arborist will only recommend topping under rare circumstances, such as to save the tree after severe physical damage to a crown, or for the decorative effect of pollarding in a formal setting or restricted space.
10. A conscientious arborist will NOT use climbing spikes if the tree is to remain in the landscape!
11. Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal clearly should be a last resort.

The Agreement

Often times when you hire a service, most terms agreed upon are made verbally. To prevent misunderstanding and be assured of the work you both agreed upon, get it in writing! Most companies have their own form and the conditions will vary. Read the document carefully. If you have questions, a local forester, consulting arborist, or your attorney may be able to clarify and add valuable insights. The International Society of Arboriculture's certified arborist directory, www.isa-arbor.com, lets you search for arborists in your local area. The American Society of Consulting Arborists' directory, www.asca-consultants.org, lets you search for a consultant in your local area.


Listed below are several key items that a contract should include:

- ❖ The dates that work will begin and end.
- ❖ Exactly what work will be done. For example, prune all dead, dying, diseased and weak branches 1-1/2 inches or greater in diameter. If your tree is to be sprayed, get a written statement telling 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.)
- ❖ If fertilizing is to be done, it should be stated how it will be done, how many pounds of fertilizer is to be used per square inch of trunk diameter and what application method will be used.
- ❖ Specify what cleanup work will be done and when.
- ❖ Clarify if removal of a tree includes grinding out the stump and surface roots to one foot below grade, filling with top soil and planting grass.
- ❖ The total dollar amount you will be charged. You want to avoid surprises like "Here is the \$300 I owe you for working on my five trees." "\$300? Sorry, that was \$300 per tree!"

Work is usually priced in two ways: (a) As a single price for the job or (b) on an hourly basis plus materials. When using the latter, be sure to include the wording “...*But not to exceed,*” and *state the maximum amount you are willing to pay.* Make sure the contract is complete and clear and be satisfied in advance that your concerns will be dealt with fairly.

Shade trees are valuable especially in Northern Nevada and there are a lot of folks eager to put a chain saw to your trees for a fast buck. Using your common sense and the tips outlined here will help guarantee that cost-effective, quality work is performed on your property with little risk to you and your trees.

Source: University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Gardeners Guide

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