

# The Role of Trees and Tree Care Companies

It's hard to imagine a world without the cool comfort of shade trees in your back yard, without the gentle sound of wind blowing through the leaves on a summer day, without grand, healthy trees for your children and grandchildren to enjoy. Trees provide all these aesthetic benefits for you and they are an investment as well. On average, trees add 20 percent – and sometimes more – to the value of your real estate. They also help reduce the costs of cooling in the summer and heating in winter.

Trees are good for the environment as well, helping reduce erosion, producing oxygen, and absorbing carbon dioxide that might otherwise contribute to global warming.

Trees need care because they are susceptible to damage from diseases, insects, pollution, damage to roots and trunks, and from poor tree care practices. All these can cause injury or premature death to a tree. Professional tree care companies can improve the aesthetics and health of your trees while maintaining their value and protecting them from threats.

There are thousands of companies in the U.S. that provide tree care services such as pruning, removal, fertilization, cabling and bracing, disease and insect control. When considering a tree care company, remember that trees are alive. Company employees require a great deal of technical knowledge to provide appropriate care. Inappropriate care can injure or kill your trees.

Most consumers do not have the technical knowledge needed to determine what course of treatment or type of pruning is correct for their tree. You usually need to rely on the professional recommendations given by a tree care company.

This is why it is very important to check the credentials of a business claiming to be a tree care company. Don't just hire someone with a chain saw who knocks on your door or you get from your phone book!

## Industry Standards

Ask how the job will be done and if they will perform the work according to ANSI A300 standards. If they mention, "topping a tree," "lion's-tailing" or "using climbing spikes to prune a tree" the company does not follow industry standards. "Topping" is drastically cutting back the major limbs of a tree to reduce its size. "Lion's tailing" is an extreme stripping out of most of the interior branches of a tree. Such practices can injure or kill your tree. Sometimes these techniques will be presented as a way to save money by removing more of the tree at one time. However a tree pruned by one of these methods usually requires more expensive restoration work in the future in order to save it. Such damage may not be visible for many years afterwards, making restoration almost impossible.

## Safety and Insurance

Tree care is one of the most dangerous professions in the U.S., particularly if performed by amateurs or untrained personnel. Statistics show that performing tree care is more dangerous than working for a police or fire department. Most homeowners have no idea how easily they can be killed – especially when working on a tree near electrical wires.

This is the most dangerous part of tree work and homeowners should never do this kind of work. Every year homeowners are injured or killed trying to do their own tree work. They should not perform tree work involving climbing of any kind, work from a ladder to prune a tree, or attempt to fell (cut-down) trees.

Treeworkers employed by companies are injured also. It may seem callous, but you should protect yourself from being held responsible if a worker is injured on your property. Ask the company for an insurance certificate. Many professional companies have copies of these ready for you. Insurance should cover worker's compensation, property damage and personal liability in case of accidents. Homeowners have been held responsible for treeworkers injured on their property. In such cases the company may have appeared professional but did not have adequate – or in some cases any – insurance. You can be left holding the bag if a company with or without insurance damages your property and then fails to take responsibility. There are 4 tree companies in this area without workers compensation. They are licensed but have told the Contract Licenses Board they work alone but actually have 3 or 4 employees.

## Recommendations, References, Meeting the Company

Pay attention to your instinctive feelings when you telephone companies as well as when they send someone to look at your trees. Try to arrange a personal meeting with the representative when they first come to your property.

The person looking at your trees should be dressed professionally, have knowledge of industry standards, be willing to provide a current insurance certificate, and be prompt and courteous. They should give you a written estimate detailing work specifications so you know exactly how much work the company plans to do.

Avoid estimates with vague specifications such as: "Prune trees - \$300.00." This doesn't tell you how much work the company plans to do. Another company's bid might be higher because they plan to do more work, and it is to be done by better trained employees. You would not hire a building contractor whose estimate only stated, "Build House: \$175,000." You would likely demand more information. You should demand detailed specifications for tree work, too.

## Indications of Professionalism in Tree Care

One indicator of reliability and trustworthiness in a tree care company is membership in one or more professional organizations.

For example, a company may employ one or more certified arborist. Certification means that an arborist has passed a test administered by an organization such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), and that the individual has adequate training and knowledge to perform this work. However, you shouldn't stop there. Be thorough in your investigation of the company's practices and policies.

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