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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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## What Tree Experts Do

Tree experts, known as Arborists, provide a variety of services to help you care for the valuable investment you have made in your trees.

### Pruning

An arborist can determine what type of pruning is necessary to maintain or improve the health, appearance, and safety of your trees. These techniques include:

- Removing diseased, insect-infested, damaged, and dead limbs.
- Eliminating branches that rub each other.
- Removing limbs that interfere with wires, buildings, sidewalks, streets or obstruct views.
- Selectively removing branches to create better tree structure, to lessen wind resistance, and reduce the potential for storm damage.

### Removal

Although removal is a last resort, it is recommended when the tree is:

- dead or dying
- considered irreparably hazardous
- causing an obstruction that is impossible to correct through pruning
- to be replaced by a more suitable tree

### Emergency Tree Care

Storms may cause limbs or entire trees to fall, and possibly land on buildings, cars or other trees. An arborist can assist in the safe removal or trimming of hazardous trees, while reducing further risk of damage to your property.

### Planting

Some arborists plant trees and most can recommend appropriate trees for specific locations. The wrong tree or the wrong location could lead to future problems due to limited growing space, vulnerability to insects and/or diseases or poor growth.

*Some arborists plant trees and most can recommend what types of trees are appropriate for a specific location.*

## Other Services

Many arborists also provide a variety of other tree care services including:

- Preventative maintenance to keep trees in good health, which will help the tree better defend itself against insects and diseases.
- Fertilization and determining nutritional needs of trees.
- Cabling or bracing for added support to branches with weak attachments.
- Aeration to improve root growth.
- Installation of lightning protection systems.
- Spraying or injecting pesticides to control certain insect and disease problems.

## Selecting Arborists

Look for a combination of education, experience, certifications, licenses, and references.

### Reputable Firm

Beware of people soliciting work door to door without identification on their vehicle, uniform or I.D. card. "Door knockers" are especially common after storms when there is an opportunity for "quick money." Often, storm damage creates high risk situations for both workers and homeowners. There is potential for even more damage to trees and shrubs if work is not done correctly. You may

### *At a Glance*

- **Arborists plant, prune and care for trees.**
- **Review references, certifications, insurance, education, experience, and prior work.**
- **Obtain estimates from several companies.**
- **Secure a signed contract, specifying what work will be done and how much will be paid prior to beginning any work.**

want to phone the Industrial Commission in Phoenix, at (602) 542- 4411 and inquire as to whether the firm carries Workers Compensation. You may also wish to call the Arizona Department of Revenue to assure that the company is legal and paying proper taxes. More than one person working on your property constitutes a “business operation and employment of employees” and therefore, the company must carry all state required insurance, as well as payment of taxes.

## Insurance

Request to have a certificate of insurance (including proof of liability for personal and property damage) sent to you directly from the insurance agent. This does not cost either party any money. Be sure to call the insurance company to verify that the policy is current, even if the certificate has not expired. Under some circumstances you can be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property, or damage is done to a neighbor’s property.

## References

Ask for and verify local references. Visit and inspect some of their work. Talk to previous clients. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.

## Certifications

Ask for proof of membership in professional organizations and professional certifications. Certification does not guarantee high quality work, but it does demonstrate a basic level of professional capability and commitment to the field. Call the following associations to request a list of certified professionals practicing in your area.

### International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)

(217) 355-9411,  
(217) 355-9516 fax or  
<http://www.isa-arbor.com>

This society offers two levels of certification: Certified Arborist and Certified Tree Worker. Certification requires a broad basic knowledge of tree biology, species identification and selection, soils and tree nutrition, planting, pruning, cabling, bracing and problem diagnosis and management. It also requires 18 months of experience in Arboriculture and 30 hours of continuing education every three years. From the ISA web site you may enter your zip code or city and obtain a list of certified arborists in your area.

### National Arborists Association (NAA)

(603)314-5380,  
1-800-733-2622,  
(603)314-5386 fax,  
<http://www.natlarb.com>

Membership in NAA is comprised of commercial tree care service firms. It has developed sets of standards for pruning, cabling and other techniques widely used in the industry.

*Ask for proof of membership in professional organizations and professional certification.*

## The American Society of Consulting Arborists

(301) 947-0483

Membership is for practicing arborists who specialize in advising, diagnosing, recommending treatments, making appraisals and offering legal testimony in court. Signifies a high degree of professionalism in arboriculture. Requires academic foundation, extensive work experience, professional affiliations, and references.

## Estimates

Have more than one arborist give you an estimate. You may be required to pay for the estimate but two or more opinions are worth your extra effort. Remember that pruning is an art. The arborist’s skill and professionalism may be more important than low bid.

## Responsible Practices

While some arborists are not equipped to service every aspect of every job, a good arborist can advise and direct in all areas of tree care (pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, lightning protection, pest control, etc.)

If reducing the height of the tree is a goal, a good arborist will use “drop crotching” or “crown restoration” techniques. They will not simply chop off the top of the tree at the desired height.

A good arborist will not use climbing spikes, except in emergencies, if the tree is to remain in the landscape.

Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal should be a last resort.

## Cost

Well cared-for trees can contribute up to 15 percent of your property value, so the expense of proper care is an excellent investment. Commercial arborists have large investments in equipment and training. Trucks, hydraulic booms, chippers, sprayers, stump cutters and chain saws represent major capitol investments and maintenance costs. Labor, insurance, safety training, and continuing education add to the overhead. The price charged for the job reflects all of these costs as well as a reasonable margin of profit. You may cut down on the cost by scheduling your work well in advance. By coordinating with your neighbors you may be able to obtain a group discount.

## Contract

A contract is the key to preventing misunderstandings and assuring the work is performed to the standards you expect. Most companies have their own forms, and conditions vary widely. Read the document carefully and check with your attorney if you have questions. There are several key items that a contract should include:

- 1) The date that work is to begin and end.
- 2) Exactly what work will be done. For example, “Prune all dead, dying, diseased and weak branches 1.5 inches or greater in diameter.”
- 3) Specify that the work will be done according to the

International Society of Arboriculture, Western Chapter, Pruning Standards and the ANSI Z133.1, 1988 Safety Standards. (A copy may be obtained from the Certification Committee, P.O. Box 3118, Napa, CA 94558.)

- 4) If your tree is to be sprayed, get a written statement detailing 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.).
- 5) If fertilizing is to be done, specify type, amount and method of application. A rough map of the property identifying trees to be serviced, or a clearly written description of location.
- 6) Specify what clean-up work will be done and when.
- 7) Clarify who will get any firewood, and if it is for you, will it be cut into 16 inch lengths and stacked by the garage?
- 8) Clarify if removal of tree includes grinding out the stump and surface roots to one foot below grade, filling with topsoil and planting grass.
- 9) What is the absolute total dollar amount you will be charged? Leave no room for confusion over whether the price is per tree or for the whole job. Work is usually priced as a single fee for the whole job or on an hourly basis plus materials. When using the latter, be sure to include the wording, "but not to exceed..."

*Remember: at first glance a well pruned tree often looks as if no work was done at all.*

## Types of Tree Workers

### Certified Arborist

Certification by the International Society of Arboriculture. Exam on tree identification and care. 30 hours of continuing education required every three years.

### Certified Horticulturist

Certification by the American Society for Horticultural Science. Minimum qualifications are a BS in horticulture and five years of experience. Intended primarily for agricultural consultants or expert witnesses.

### Certified Tree Worker

Certification by International Society of Arboriculture. Two exams: an oral test on all aspects of tree care, and a practical exam covering climbing skills and aerial rescue procedures. Requires 18 months of experience, no college training required, continuing education is required.

### Consulting Arborist

Anyone may call themselves a consulting arborist; membership in the American Society of Consulting Arborists is not required.

### Forester

B.S. in Forestry. Focus on management of forests and wild lands to produce wood, water, forage, recreational opportunities, wildlife.

### Landscape Architect

BS in Landscape Architecture; state license. Specializes in landscape planning, design and construction. Expertise in horticulture and tree care is not required.

### Landscape Designer

No license or certification required. General knowledge of landscape design, construction and species selection.

### Master Gardener

Volunteer trained and certified by the University of Arizona to provide home horticulture and gardening advise through county Cooperative Extension offices as a public service.

### Ornamental Horticulturist

B.S., M.S., or Ph.D. in Ornamental Horticulture. (Related agricultural sciences which also provide a good foundation for arborists include forestry, plant pathology, plant physiology, botany and agronomy.)

*Certification does not guarantee high quality work, but it does demonstrate a basic level of professional capability and commitment to the field.*

## References

- "Defining the Tree Professional," California Releaf Remarks, Fall of 1992.
- J. R. Fazio, "How to Hire an Arborist," Tree City USA Bulletin No. 6.
- S. Sandfort & E. Butcher, American Forestry Association's Urban Forestry Home Workbook.
- "Why Hire an Arborist," International Society of Arboriculture, 1994.

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