



Department of Environmental Conservation

How to Find an Arborist or Tree Care Service

Hiring professionals to assess and care for your trees requires careful consideration. Qualified professionals will perform the work safely and properly to ensure the continued health of your tree. Unqualified people may cause further damage and burden clients with potential liability. Tree care work is hazardous and requires training to perform safely.

Arborists are qualified professionals, certified by the International Arboriculture Society (ISA). ISA Certified arborists receive specialized training and pass a test to become certified and then must maintain their certification through ongoing training and education. You can learn more about ISA certification and find ISA Arborists near you by visiting the ISA Website (leaves DEC website).

Many professionals in the tree care industry may not be certified arborists, but they may be members of the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA). TCIA offers training, support, and resources to its members. You can learn more about TCIA and find TCIA member companies at their website (leaves DEC website).

Selecting a tree care company can be a challenging task. For the safety of yourself, your family, your property, your neighbors, and your community, it's important to work with qualified professionals. Here are some points to keep in mind when hiring or contracting with an arborist or tree care service:

Check online on contractor listing sites or with a web search for tree care services near you.

Be cautious of professionals or companies that advertise "topping" as a service - topping is a poor practice, injures trees, and creates weak branches more prone to failure.

Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for person and property damage and workman's compensation. Then contact the insurance company to make sure the policy is current. Under some circumstances you could be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property or if the worker damages a neighbor's property.

Ask for local references or look for references online. If possible, look at the work and speak with former clients.

Don't rush into a decision because you are promised a discount if you sign now. Be sure you understand what work is to be done and what the cost is. In general, don't pay in full until the work is completed.

Get multiple estimates from different contractors, and let them each know you are soliciting multiple bids.

Most reputable tree care companies have all the work they can handle without going door to door. People who are not arborists may solicit tree work after storms, seeing an opportunity to earn quick money. Storm damage creates high risk situations for both workers and property.

Legitimate professionals never ask for payment in advance.

A conscientious professional will not use climbing spikes except when removing a tree. Climbing spikes open wounds on the tree that can lead to decay.

Know that good tree work can be expensive. A good professional must carry several kinds of insurance as well as pay for expensive and specialized equipment. Removing urban trees in close proximity to people and property may require highly specialized equipment and be done slowly. Beware of estimates that fall well below the average because there may be hidden costs or the professional may not be fully insured or trained.