



How to Hire an Arborist

Many important tree care practices such as pruning, watering, mulching, and fertilizing of young trees can be accomplished by the homeowner. However, as trees become older and larger, some these tasks, especially pruning, become more difficult and potentially dangerous. Professional arborists are available to assist homeowners with the proper care of their trees from the beginning of the trees life to the time they must be removed from the landscape.

Arborists

Arborists are persons that specialize in the management and care of individual trees. A professional arborist is knowledgeable about tree care and usually has formally studied in the area of arboriculture, forestry, or horticulture, and/or has had extensive training in the area of arboriculture through workshops, short courses, and profession societies. Practicing Arborists perform actual tree care practices, while Consulting Arborists give recommendations but don't actually carry out the tree care procedures. Your particular situation will determine which type of arborist you will need. Information contained in this brochure will focus on those that perform tree care work.

What does an Arborist do?

Professional arborists can provide a wide variety of technical services. These services include:

Pruning- The purpose of pruning is to promote tree health, proper tree form, and to create a safe environment in the area surrounding the tree. This is accomplished by removing branches with weak V-shaped crotches, branches that rub together, dead branches, damaged or diseased branches, branches that rub against some part of the house or other structures, and branches that compete for light. Pruning may also be used to repair damage caused by a wind or ice storm, and to remove branches that are a potential hazard to objects below them. An arborist is trained to work safely with all sizes of trees. One pruning practice a trained arborist will not promote is Topping.



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General Care- The best way to avoid tree health problems is to use proper care procedures. An arborist can determine a tree's fertility needs, and apply the right fertilizer, if necessary. An arborist also can monitor the tree for insect and disease problems, and take appropriate action to manage a problem when necessary. An arborist may use soil aeration equipment to improve air movement in the root zone, when compaction is a problem.

An arborist will use mulch around a tree to reduce competing vegetation, retain moisture, reduce soil temperature, improve soil structure (by increasing organic matter), and prevent mechanical damage from lawn mowers and weed wips. When trees have not been pruned, weak branches and double leaders can develop. An arborist can recommend cabling and bracing techniques to improve the strength of these weak points. Since trees often rise above many of the objects in the landscape, they can be targets for lightning; an arborist is aware of the best methods available to protect high value trees from lightning strikes.

Removal- Occasionally, a tree must be removed because it is creating a potential hazard, is severely damaged or dead, is too close to a building, or is interfering with new construction. Arborists are trained and equipped to safely remove trees without harming themselves or surrounding property.

Consulting- Before building near established trees, changing the grade (soil level) around trees, or when attempting to determine the value of a damaged tree, homeowners may wish to enlist the help of a trained arborist. Many arborists give recommendations on pre-

venting construction damage to trees; they may also appraise the dollar value of trees for tax, insurance and casualty loss purposes. Some arborists also will develop a tree planting plan which may include information on species selection, type of planting stock, planting location, and required post-planting care. Planting of trees and post-planting care is sometimes carried out by arborists.

Hiring an Arborist

* Owning a truck and a chainsaw does not automatically qualify someone as an arborist. Some door-to-door "arborists" may claim to have noticed a tree in your yard requiring immediate attention. These so-called arborists may not have you or your trees best interests in mind. Most established arborists are busy, and do not create new business by going door-to-door.

* Before searching for an arborist, be sure the tree needing work is on your property and not on public property or in your neighbor's yard. Many cities in Iowa have ordinances that regulate the management of vegetation on public property; this usually includes trees in the area between the street and sidewalk. Also, many cities require arborists to be licensed to work within the city limits. Inquire at city hall for any rules or regulations that pertain to trees and their management.

* Consult the yellow pages in the telephone directory for listings of arborists, under the heading Tree Service or Tree Care. If you have a city forester he or she will have a list of arborists in your community. Also, check with friends and neighbors for names of arborists know for satisfactory service.

* As you make contact with arborists, ask if they are a member of an organization such as the National Arborist Association, Iowa Arborists Association, International Society of Arboriculture or the American Society of Consulting Arborist; those organizations certify and/or offer continuing education and training for arborists. Membership in one or all of these organizations does not guarantee quality.

* Make sure the arborist has sufficient insurance for personal and property damage, and workers compensation. This should include coverage for damage that might occur to public property and your neighbor's property. An arborist should have a minimum of \$300,000 in general liability coverage. If you are in doubt, call their insurance company to make sure their policy is up-to-date. There have been cases where the person hiring the arborist was held liable for damages, because the arborist was uninsured or lacked the proper coverage. Often communities have ordinances that specify insurance requirements for arborists, contact city hall for this information.

* Get references from the arborist and check work they have completed in the area. The work that this person will do for you is important, so take time to look into their workmanship.

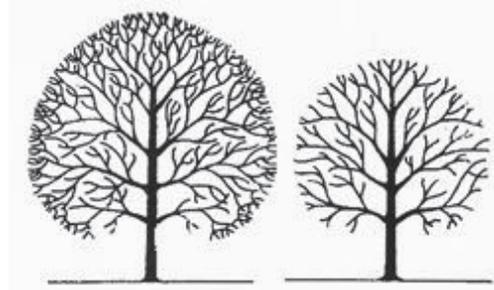
* Most experienced and reputable arborists will provide a variety of services, such as pruning, fertilizing, mulching, cabling and bracing and removal. Also, a reputable arborist will not use pruning methods like topping, will make the proper pruning cuts, and will not use climbing spikes on trees that are not being removed.

* If time permits, obtain tree work estimates from several arborists. Make sure to get a written estimate listing all work to be done. Read through the details carefully, and be sure you understand what will be done. The cost of good tree care is not cheap. Most arborists have a heavy investment in equipment, labor, safety training and insurance; a bid for a job has to reflect many of those costs.

* Before the work starts, obtain some type of written contract that specifies what will be done, how it will be accomplished, and the start and completion dates for the job. For example, if pruning is needed, have the arborist specify what type and size of branches will be removed. Also, if any chemicals or fertilizers are to be used, obtain the name of the product, the amounts to be used, and a list of any precautions that need to be taken to protect children, animals, and personal property. Find out if you will be billed at an hourly rate (if so, give a limit of hours to be used), or one lump sum for the entire job. Don't be afraid to ask about anything that pertains to the work to be done. If there is not a written contract, write a letter to the arborist specifying what you want done and be very specific. This will give you some record of the work you requested.

* To help yourself when dealing with arborist, be as knowledgeable about trees and tree care as you can. There are a number of extension pamphlets available through Iowa State University that will give you good background on trees and tree care. These include: Pm-686e Tree Wound Response and Treatment, Pm-1304 Pruning Shade and Flowering Trees, Pm-1387 Managing Storm Damaged Trees, Pm-909 Preventing Construction Damage to Trees, Pm-1429f Power Lines and Trees, Pm-1429e Street Trees for Iowa, Rm-1429d Low Growing Trees for Urban and Rural Iowa, Pm-1429g Conifer Species for Iowa, and Pm-422 Planting Landscape Trees.

Proper Pruning/Thinning



When pruning, a trained arborist will remove branches back to another lateral branch or to the main trunk like in the picture on the right.

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