

Hiring a Tree Care Professional

Trees are large components in the landscape, in size and lifespan. When pests, pathogens, or disorders appear and a tree is not cared for properly, trees can pose a hazard.

Hiring someone to assess tree health care needs is the first step to ensuring the long-term safety and health of trees on your property. Abiotic or stress disorders, fungal or bacterial diseases, insect or wildlife damage, and even soil management issues can affect trees.

Certified arborists are specially trained and qualified in evaluation and diagnosis of tree disorders through the International Society of Arboriculture. Certification requires knowledge of the science and standards of tree establishment, pruning, safety, and fertilization through national ANSI standards.

Before hiring a tree care professional

Know what you need

- **Identification:** Identify the species and cultivar. Contact your local Illinois Extension office at go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice for help with tree identification or consult an identification guide. Tree care companies should be able to identify species and perform work accordingly.
- **Diagnosis:** Document the history of that tree and what surrounds it. A reliable company will ask:
 - When was the tree planted, how, and by whom? Where was it purchased?
 - Has there been any construction nearby, i.e. sidewalk, deck, buildings/structures?
 - Has the tree ever been pruned, how, when, and by whom?
 - Has something unusual been observed? This might include insects, weeping, oozing, foliar spots, cankers, shoot die back, wounds or decay on trunk, and fungal growth on or around the tree.



Photographer Sarah Vogel. Tree care should often be left to the professionals who are trained to deal with dangerous scenarios such as nearby power lines.

- When were symptoms first noticed? Where do they occur on the plant?
- What is the pattern of symptoms over time?
- **Upkeep:** Do you want your trees fertilized? Reduced in size? Regular maintenance may be the specialty of some companies but not others.
- **Pruning:** Are you pruning a fruit tree for increased food production or do you have a hazardous limb hanging over the house?
- **Removal:** Ask how and when they will access your yard. Precautions may be taken to minimize damage to surrounding structures, trees, and other objects.

Confirm the company is insured

Insurance can protect both the tree service and the homeowner from litigation if there is an accident. Liability insurance covers damage to your property, and worker's compensation insurance covers injuries to employees working on your property. Ask to see proof of insurance before work begins.

Safety: Companies should require crew members to use personal protective equipment and follow national ANSI safety standards. It is not the client's responsibility to enforce this, but they can specify that all work be performed according to safety standards.

Ask for and check referrals

A brief conversation with another customer can often provide valuable insight on what to expect. Online reviews are handy, but they don't always paint the whole picture.

Get estimates

Before starting, get estimates from two to three companies. Ask about costs, payment terms, a written estimate of all charges, services offered, equipment used, and time estimates. Remember that cheap doesn't always mean good.

Ask for a contract if one is not offered. This holds both parties accountable in the event of miscommunication. Be sure you and the tree service professional agree what tasks will be performed and when. Don't be afraid to ask questions; tree care can be costly, and a considerate professional will take time to explain the process.

Consider credentials

International Society of Arboriculture Certified arborists are recommended but not required. The arborist may belong to a local chapter or other professional associations. These memberships show professional commitment. Other credentials may demonstrate ability and commitment such as AED and CPR trained, Emergency Aerial Rescue certified, Powerline Safety certified, Climber Safety certified.

Find a certified arborist

Contact your local Extension office at go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice

- International Society of Arboriculture treesaregood.org/findanarborist
- Tree Care Industry Association go.illinois.edu/ISAFindanarborist
- American Society of Consulting Arborists www.asca-consultants.org
- Illinois Arborist Association go.illinois.edu/IAAFindanarborist

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