

WORKING WITH ARBORISTS

You may need to consult with an arborist before cutting tree roots to put in a new sidewalk, or before doing other construction work. People often hire arborists to do pruning also, which may be necessary to thin branches, provide better structure, control the size of the tree, reduce wind resistance, or prevent branches from interfering with wires.

Arborists can also help by fertilizing, providing lightning protection systems, and installing supports between forked trunks and branches. Some homeowners hire arborists to check on their trees once or twice a year. This can be a good approach, for it catches problems before they do irreparable damage.

When hiring an arborist, keep these tips in mind:

- Beware of “door knockers,” especially after storms when nonprofessionals are looking for an easy way to make quick money. Most reputable arborists have all the work they can handle without going door-to-door.
- Don’t be rushed, even if a company says they will give you a 10 percent discount for a decision today. Do *not* pay in advance.
- Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage and worker’s compensation. Then phone the insurance company to make sure the policy is current. In some cases, you may be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property or damage is done to a neighbor’s property.
- Ask for local references or other jobs that the company or individual has done. Then look at these jobs and, if possible, talk to the former client.
- Determine if the arborist is a member of the American Forestry Association, the American Society of Consulting Arborists, the International Society of Arboriculture, or the National Arborists Association. Membership does not guarantee quality, but a lack of membership can cast doubts on the person’s professionalism.
- Determine if the individual is actually certified as an arborist. The International Society of Arboriculture can give you a list of certified arborists where you live. You can reach them at the International Society of Arboriculture, Post Office Box 3129, Champaign, IL 61826-3129, (217) 355-9411. You can also access the ISA’s arborists search page at <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findArborist/findarborist.aspx>. Keep in mind, however, that just as with membership in professional associations, certification does not guarantee quality.
- A good arborist will offer a wide range of services. Pruning, fertilizing, cabling or bracing, protecting against lightning, and repairing damage.

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- A good arborist will recommend “topping” a tree *only under very rare circumstances* – to save the tree after severe damage to its crown. “Topping” is the severe cutting or heading back of the major structural limbs in the tree.
- If the arborist recommends tree injections of pesticide or other pesticide applications, he or she must have a valid pesticide applicators license.
- A conscientious arborist will *not* use climbing spikes unless the tree is being removed.
- Tree removal is a last resort. Beware of an arborist that is eager to remove a living tree.
- To save money, get together with neighbors and ask about a group discount.
- Find out exactly what work is to be done and how much you will be charged. Work may be done for a single price or for an hourly fee plus the cost of materials. If an arborist uses the latter pricing method, make sure you understand what the maximum charge would be. Obtain an estimate in writing.
- Unless you know and are comfortable with the Arborist, get more than one estimate. You may have to pay for the estimates, and it will take more time, but it will be worth the investment.
- Don’t always accept the low bid. You should examine the credentials and the written specifications of the firms who submitted bids and determine the best combination of price, work to be done, skill and professionalism to protect your substantial investment.
- Make sure the contract specifies the dates that work will begin and end.
- Find out what cleanup work will be done and when. Decide who gets any firewood or wood chips. If you will get the firewood, will it be cut into 16-inch lengths and stacked by the garage?
- Find out if tree removal includes grinding out the stump and surface roots to 1 foot below grade, filling the hole with topsoil, and planting grass.

Information sources: How to Hire an Arborist, Tree City USA Bulletin No. 6, National Arbor Day Foundation, 100 Arbor Ave., Nebraska City, NE 68410; Why Hire an Arborist, International Society of Arboriculture, Post Office Box 3129, Champaign, IL 61826-3129; *Kevin Harrel*, certified arborist, PO Box 14076, Springfield, MO 65814.