



# Hiring a Tree Service

(adapted from [http://www.treesaregood.org/treecare/hire\\_arborist.aspx](http://www.treesaregood.org/treecare/hire_arborist.aspx) )

Many important tree care practices such as pruning, watering, mulching and fertilization of young trees can be accomplished by the homeowner. However, as trees become established and larger, some of 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.



Owning a truck and a chainsaw does not automatically qualify someone as a tree care professional. Most folks in the tree care profession call themselves arborists. Arborists are persons that specialize in the management and care of individual trees, and their education and/or training is in the field of tree care. There are qualified arborists throughout the state, but to protect yourself and your property consider some of the following suggestions when hiring individuals or companies for tree care services.

1. Make sure the tree is on your property. If the tree is on the 'parking' between the sidewalk and the curb in front of your property, call City of Des Moines at 283-4950 to inquire about pruning or removal by the city.

2. Beware of people knocking on your door offering to work on your tree, because they noticed it needed some work and they can offer you a bargain rate to take care of it. These so-called "arborists" may not have you or your trees' best interests in mind. Most established arborists are busy, and they do not create new business by going door-to-door.

3. Check the yellow pages in the phone book for a listing of tree care professionals, under the heading Tree Services or Tree Care. Also, check with friends or neighbors that have had work done by a reputable company or individual.



4. Make sure the company has insurance for personal and property damage, and workers compensation. Ask for evidence of this insurance. If the contractor is licensed as a 'contractor' with the State of Iowa, all of these are required. Simply ask to see their State registration.

5. Ask for and check local references or past clients.

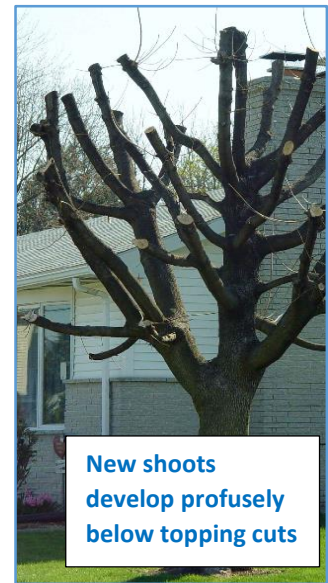
6. Check to see if they are a member of a state and/or national association or society.



Certification provides a measurable assessment of an individual's knowledge and competence required to provide proper tree care. These groups often have training and certification programs for their members. The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) is one example of an organization with a certification program for arborists. Check their home page for ISA-certified arborists in your area.

7. 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.

8. Use your knowledge of correct tree care practices. If they say your tree should be "topped" or they use spikes to climb trees, they are NOT the company or individual you want to hire. "Topping" is basically the indiscriminate removal of branches with no consideration of proper cuts that promote proper tree response. When trees are topped, they will respond with a flush of new growth the next season that is weakly attached to the open pruning wounds, and susceptible to breakage and decay. Using tree spikes to climb trees can create wounds on the tree that are open to attack by decay organisms.



9. Obtain some type of written contract that specifies what will be done, how it will be accomplished, the costs, 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. If a contract is not forthcoming, you should write a letter specifying what you want to be done, in what time frame, and how much you will pay for the work.

10. Obtain the name of the chemicals or fertilizers, the amounts to be used, and a list of precautions that need to be taken to protect children, animals and personal property.



11. Discuss money! Find out if you will be billed at an hourly rate, or one lump sum for the entire job. If hourly, YOU should specify the maximum number of hours you are willing to pay for. If a lump sum, find out in advance what the hourly rate is in case there is additional work to be done.

12. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You are the boss!

13. Don't pay for the job until all work agreed upon has been completed.

Go to [www.dmgov.org](http://www.dmgov.org) for more information and links.