

HIRING AN ARBORIST IN ROBBINSDALE

Your trees are a valuable investment that, when properly cared for, grow in value and beauty. Since trees don't heal like people, it is important to hire trained tree care workers (arborists) to meet your needs, as well as those of your landscape plants. The City of Robbinsdale requires arborists to be licensed. This means that, at the time of licensing, they showed proof of liability and worker's compensation insurance. It's a good idea to ask the arborist for proof that these remain in effect. Thanks to the National Arbor Day Foundation, which provided most of this information.

- 1 Check in the phone directory, usually under Trees, Tree Service or Tree Care Service. Although anyone can list themselves in the yellow pages, a listing at least indicates some degree of permanence.
- 2 Beware of door-knockers. Most reputable companies have all the work they can handle without going door-to-door. Door-knockers are especially common after storms when non-professionals see a chance to earn some quick money. Often, storm damage creates high risk situations for both workers and homeowners, and there is opportunity for even more damage to trees and shrubs if work is not done correctly.
- 3 Find out if the arborist is certified through a local certification program or the International Society of Arboriculture. ISA's program is available to arborists nationwide and requires appropriate training, experience and knowledge as evidenced by successfully completing a standardized application and testing process. In some cities, arborists are required to have a license. Check with city hall, then use only an arborist who is in compliance if licensing is included in your community's ordinances.
- 4 Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage (such as your house and your neighbor's), and workman's compensation. Then phone the insurance company to make certain the policy is current. *Under some circumstances, you can be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property, or damage is done to a neighbor's property!*
- 5 Ask for local references — other jobs the company or individual has done. Take a look at some, and if possible, talk with the former client. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.
- 6 Determine if the arborist is a member of any of the organizations shown on page 8. Membership does not guarantee quality, but lack of membership casts doubt on the person's professionalism.
- 7 Never let yourself be rushed by bargains ("If you sign an agreement today, I can take ten percent off the price..."). *Never pay in advance.*
- 8 Have more than one arborist look at your job and give you estimates. Don't expect one to lower a bid to match another's, and be willing to pay for the estimate if necessary; but two or more opinions and cost estimates are worth your extra effort.
- 9 A good arborist will offer a wide range of services (pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, lightning protection, pest control, etc.)



Avoid arborists who routinely top trees.

- 10 A good arborist will recommend topping a tree only under rare circumstances (such as to save the tree after severe physical damage to the crown, or for the decorative effect of pollarding in a formal setting or restricted space).
- 11 A conscientious arborist will not use climbing spikes if the tree is to remain in the landscape.
- 12 Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal clearly should be a last resort.

Price

Tree care costs money. But considering that trees can contribute up to 15 percent of your property value, the expense of proper care is one of the best investments you can make. Tree care, like personal health care, is not the place to cut corners.

Reputable arborists have made large investments in equipment and training. Trucks, hydraulic booms, chippers, sprayers, stump cutters and chainsaws represent major capital investments and maintenance costs. Labor, insurance, safety training and continuing education add to the overhead. The price charged for a job reflects all these costs as well as a reasonable margin of profit.

Remember that pruning is an art. The arborist's skill and professionalism may be more important than low bid.

Here are two good ways to save on the cost of tree care:

- S Schedule your work well in advance, maybe as much as six months. Most arborists are busy, and many services must be done during a certain time of year. By allowing the company to schedule your work in advance and, if possible, when other work is at low ebb, you may be able to arrange a savings on price.
- S If you can get together with several neighbors who also need work done, you may be able to interest a company in a group

The Agreement

To prevent misunderstandings and be assured of having your work performed to the standards you expect, a contract is the key. Most companies have their own form and the conditions included vary widely. Read the document carefully. If you have questions, a local forester, consulting arborist, or your attorney may be able to add clarification and valuable insights.

In an article that is part of American Forest's Urban Forestry Home Workbook, urban forester Steve Sandfort and arborist/company president Edwin Butcher listed several key items that a contract should include:

- ✓ The dates that work will begin and end.
- ✓ Exactly what work will be done. For example, "prune all dead, dying, diseased and weak branches 1½ inches or greater in diameter." If your tree is to be sprayed, get a written statement detailing the specific insect or disease to be treated, the chemical to be used and how much, and what you need to do (cover lawn furniture, keep pets inside, etc.). If fertilizing is to be done, it should be stated how many pounds of fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter will be applied by what method.
- ✓ Specify what cleanup work will be done and when. Who gets any firewood, and if it is you, will it be cut into 16-inch lengths and stacked by the garage?
- ✓ Clarify if removal of a tree includes grinding out the stump and surface roots to one foot below grade, filling with topsoil and planting grass.
- ✓ The total dollar amount you will be charged. You don't want a surprise such as: "Here is the \$300 I owe you for working on my five trees." "\$300? Sorry, lady, that was \$300 per tree!"
- ✓ Work is usually priced one of two ways: (a) as a single price for the job, or (b) on an hourly basis plus materials. When using the latter, be sure to include the wording, "...but not to exceed..."

And don't be shy about asking questions such as, "How do you make your pruning cuts?" or "How can I be sure that pedestrians and curious children will be kept safe?"

In short, be sure you have a contract that is complete and clear, and be satisfied in advance that your concerns will be dealt with fairly by the people you hire to work on your trees.

If a dispute does arise or you would like an expert to check the quality of work before you pay the bill, seek the services of a consulting arborist (See page 8), urban forester, park or utility arborist, or similar specialist who is not in competition with the arborists you hired.

Use Arborists for Preventative Care

Some arborists offer inspections of your trees for a flat annual rate. This is an excellent way to have insect or disease problems diagnosed in time to take effective action. It can also assure light, early pruning that will prevent major, corrective pruning later on. Regular fertilizing, soil aeration, deep watering, and similar routine tasks will also help assure that your trees remain healthy. Sometimes this kind of inspection/preventative maintenance program is called Plant Health Care.

For more information...

Internat'l Soc. Of Arboriculture
www.isa-arbor
(certified arborists list,
good information)

Univ. of Minnesota Extension
www.extension.umn.edu/info
(good information)

Minnesota Landscape Arboretum
www.arboretum.umn.edu
(good information - plants)

City of Robbinsdale
www.ci.robbinsdale.mn.us
Forestry: 763/537-4534x431

Like a Good Haircut...

Remember at first glance a well-pruned tree often looks like no work was done at all, even after an arborist has spent a good amount of time removing numerous carefully selected branches. Like a good haircut.

