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SP684 Selecting a Tree-Care Company

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

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Choosing a tree-care company is similar to choosing most any professional service. The people performing the work must be knowledgeable, properly equipped, safety-conscious and have the experience to perform the service. Outlined below are a few questions that will help the informed consumer select a tree-care company and expect quality work at a reasonable cost.

Does the company have current workman's compensation insurance as well as personal and property damage insurance?

To avoid liability for hazards associated with tree work, property owners should verify that service providers have insurance coverage for workman's compensation, property damage and personal liability. Reputable companies will have insurance certificates available to show you. If there is any question, you may contact the insurance provider to verify coverage. Requiring that the tree service be insured is not a matter of trust; it is a matter of making sure there are financial resources available if something goes wrong. Tree pruning, climbing and removal are very hazardous activities, especially when working with large trees near electric lines.

Get a detailed written estimate of the work needed and the cost.

Most respectable and professional companies will provide detailed work specifications and explain to the customer why certain work should be accomplished with the associated benefits and risks. Estimates with vague descriptions such as --- Pruning \$400 ---- do not tell you much about the how, when, where and why the work should be done.

Does the company have references for similar work completed?

Tree care can be a major investment. Do not hesitate to ask for references. Companies with a good track record will gladly provide them. Seek references from neighbors, friends and business associates.

Does the company follow the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards (ANSI A300) for tree-care operations including pruning, planting, cabling, fertilizing, support systems and lightning-protection systems?

Familiarity with these standards indicates an awareness of commonly accepted tree-care practices. Arborists also should be familiar with ANSI Z133.1, Safety Standards, to provide some assurance that the work will be done safely.

For more information about how to take care of your trees and how to select responsible tree care professionals in your area, refer to the following Web sites.

The Tree Care Industry Association
www.tcia.org

International Society of Arboriculture
www.isa-arbor.com

American Society of Consulting Arborists
www.asca-consultants.org

Better Business Bureau
www.bbb.org

Is the company a member of a professional organization such as the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) or the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA)? Does the company employ ISA-Certified Arborists?

Membership in these organizations demonstrates a commitment to continuing education and a commitment to stay current with new information and technologies. Certified arborists demonstrate a level of knowledge in the art and science of tree care by passing a comprehensive examination developed by nationally recognized tree-care professionals and having at least three years of experience. The employment of certified arborists demonstrates a commitment to quality and professionalism.

Is the cost of the service reasonable?

Getting estimates from several tree-care companies for a service will give you an evaluation of costs. Tree care can be rather expensive, especially on trees with large crowns. Most professional services will have similar costs. If there is a divergence of estimates, determine whether similar services are being planned.

Professional work usually includes justified expenses. Services done correctly will affect the health, maintenance and longevity of your trees. Substandard work may detract from a tree's appearance, shorten its life or increase the amount of maintenance required in later years. Although most of the cost associated with tree care is labor, running a business also includes indirect costs such as equipment, insurance coverage and professional training.

Be cautious!

Make sure that you investigate and reference companies that solicit tree services door-to-door, do not provide detailed work orders or estimates and perform tree topping (see UT Extension Publication SP 549, *Tree Topping Hurts Trees*). Some of these people are strictly tree cutters (have chain saw and truck, will travel) and do not have expertise in tree care and maintenance. Following weather events such as tornados and ice storms, many unscrupulous people are in the tree-care (or tree-cutting) market.

Be informed!

The answers to questions posed in this publication should provide you with the information and guidelines for making an informed decision about your tree-care needs. Do not hesitate to ask questions and expect satisfactory answers. Maintaining healthy trees on your property is an investment that will provide many rewards, including a lifetime of enjoyment.

Sources:

Armstrong, K. 2004. Hiring a tree care company – what you need to know. USDA Forest Services and Michigan State University. Emerald Ash Borer Web site: <http://www.emeraldashborer.info/hiringtreeco.cfm>

Council of Better Business Bureaus. 2005, How to choose a tree care company. Publication No. 07-01-TRC. http://www.tcia.org/PDFs/BBBtipsBrochure8_05.pdf

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