



HOW TO HIRE A TREE SERVICE

Hiring a tree service can be stressful. Some may not want to remove a tree that has been part of their yard but worry it may damage their property. Also, as many already know, it can be quite expensive to have a tree removed. A simple web search will provide you with many tree service companies, but how do you know if you're getting a professional or just someone with a chainsaw? Below are some best practices to ensure a less-stress tree care experience.

First, what is an arborist or a tree surgeon? Arborist and/or tree surgeon are titles that require no training. However, a Certified Arborist, one who has been certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), is a professional who has demonstrated a basic knowledge of tree care through the completion of a comprehensive exam on tree trimming, care and removal. In addition to the initial examination, ISA Certified Arborists must earn continuing education credits annually to stay up-to-date with the latest techniques for safely removing or caring for your tree(s). Professional tree care companies may also be members of organizations such as The International Society of Arboriculture, American Society of Consulting Arborists, Tree Care Industry Association, or the Florida Arborists Association. Fortunately, the ISA's webpage allows you to search for ISA Certified Arborists in your area. Visit www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist and enter your zip code to find a list of certified arborists, the company they are with, and any additional ISA credentials they may hold.

Legally, no licensing is required for tree service companies other than a regular Occupational License. Personal and Property Damage Liability Insurance and Worker's Compensation Insurance are both very important. A business may have been issued an exemption from workers' compensation. If so, they should possess a wallet-size card bearing the seal of the State of Florida, an authorization signature, and the business name, address, the exempted individual and an effective date. Note, having this exemption means that the homeowner may not be protected from claims if a worker is injured on your property. You can confirm Workers' Compensation coverage by contacting the insurance carrier, if provided, or by visiting the Florida Department of Financial Services Proof of Coverage web site at <https://apps8.fldfs.com/proofofcoverage/Search.aspx>. They can also be contacted by telephone through a toll-free number - 1-877-MY-FL-CFO (1-877-693-5236).

Once you've checked in to the above, a good practice is to get two or more estimates of the work you want done. Most tree service companies will provide estimates at no cost, however, if you end up needing professional advice on what should be done, a consultation fee may be appropriate. Remember, quality of work may be more important than price. Ask them to prioritize what tasks are most important to accomplish your goals (such as which trees are most hazardous or which trees are most expensive) so that you can conform your plan to your budget. Ask for a complete written estimate of all services recommended before you sign a

contract. This should be on a formal estimate sheet with complete details of all work intended to be performed. This should include tasks such as disposal of debris, cleaning the work area, removal of wood, or if they will cut and stack firewood. Finally, you should have a clear understanding in writing as to how your property, driveways, and lawns will be protected from potential damage that may result from the felling of trees and/or the use of heavy equipment.

A special note about stump grinding: This process generally leaves the client with a large quantity of wood chips that may need to be removed. Also, if you plan to resod this area, you must remove the woodchips from the hole and backfill with soil prior to resodding. The party that is to be responsible for this should be decided in advance.

Always have a signed contract stipulating the scope of work, total dollar amount and completion date of work to be performed. As with any document, read the contract carefully before signing. You should receive a legible copy. This will help protect against possible future disagreements over what services were suggested and agreed to. Any certificates of insurance should be issued directly to you from their insurance carrier with you listed as the certificate holder.

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