Preparation for a Career

The job market in tree work is wide open for anyone in good physical condition and who loves the outdoors. There are two ways to enter the field. One is by beginning as a ground crew member or tree climber with an established company. Many offer excellent training and opportunities for advancement. The other way is to obtain a college education in arboriculture, urban horticulture, or urban forestry. To see a list of colleges and universities that offer degree programs in these fields, visit the Web site of the International Society of Arboriculture at: isa-arbor.com and click on Careers in Arboriculture.

Tree City USA Bulletin ORDER FORM

Name ____________________________
Organization ______________________
Address __________________________
City __________ State _______ Zip _____
Phone ____________________________

1. How to Prune Young Shade Trees $5.00 ea.
2. When a Storm Strikes $2.00 ea.
3. Resolving Tree-Sidewalk Conflicts $2.00 ea.
4. The Right Tree for the Right Place $2.00 ea.
5. Living With Urban Soils $2.00 ea.
6. How to Hire an Arborist $2.00 ea.
7. Tree City USA Annual Report $5.00 ea.

TOTAL: $__________

Annual Friends of Tree City USA Membership $15.00
Tree City USA Bulletin 3-Hole Binder $5.00
TOTAL PAYMENT: $__________

Order Tree City USA Bulletin online at arborday.org or send this form and mail with your payment to:
Arbor Day Foundation, 211 N. 13th St., Lincoln, NE 68508 888-448-7357
(Make checks payable to Arbor Day Foundation)

How to Hire an Arborist

Around the home or along the avenue, trees are one of our most valuable assets. They are also a long-term investment. Like any investment the trees require careful decisions and the occasional advice and service of a professional. In the world of trees, arborists form the cadre of specialists who can safeguard your trees and save you from the long-term consequences of their neglect or the wrong decision. In this issue, learn how you can judge when to call an arborist and how to select the right one.
When Do I Need an Arborist?

Do you own shade trees and care about their place in the future? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Are your trees healthy and vigorous, but you are the kind of person who believes in preventing problems through proper planning? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Are you experiencing any of the conditions shown below? [ ] Yes [ ] No

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," the services of an arborist can help provide healthy trees and peace of mind.

Leaves don't look right?
- Yellowing or color changing
- Dead leaves
- Dark blights
- Wilting

Are limbs dying at the ends?

Are there cracks in the trunk, cankers growing on the bark, or mushrooms growing from the ground near the tree?

Is soil compaction apparent and aeration needed?

Contracting Arborist Services

In municipalities not having their own tree-care staff, contracting with local arborists is usually a better alternative than giving untrained employees from other departments the responsibility for care of the street and park trees. When contracting is used, each municipality has its standard forms and procedures. However, due to the unique nature and needs of tree care, there are special considerations worth noting. Most of the tips on pages 4 and 5 are just as applicable for a local government as they are for individual property owners. In addition, the following suggestions are offered:

- Since most contracts must be awarded to the lowest bidder, be sure to place adequate screening criteria in the work specifications. Examples include a minimum amount of insurance coverage and years of experience, evidence of equal opportunity hiring practices, etc.
- Be specific in how the tree-care work is to be performed. Standards established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) are available on pruning. This document and a companion how-to book, Best Management Practices -Pruning, are available from the International Society of Arboriculture (refer to arbor.org/bulletins).
- Require that the successful bidder possesses adequate equipment to do the job.
- Require that all works be listed that was done in the region and was over a certain dollar value. This enables an adequate check on past work performance, and prevents the bidder from listing only selected references that he or she knows will provide endorsements.
- Provide the contractor with a flier or information packet to distribute to homeowners in advance of any work done in their vicinity. This eliminates the surprise element and explains what kind of tree work will be done, why the work is necessary, and when crews will be in the area. Also include the name and phone number of the contractor or whoever should receive questions from the residents.
- Use newspaper and radio to announce contract awards and explain what tree work will be done.

 Arborists and the Urban Forestry Program

Education and Continuing Education

Education as an arborist can begin with on-the-job training, an associate degree from a college or vocational technician's program, or a baccalaureate degree in urban forestry, horticulture or a related field. For anyone with an interest in the green industry, initial opportunities for education and entry into the profession present no barrier.

For the employers of arborists, both private and governmental, the challenge is in providing continuing education opportunities. Continuing education is essential for keeping arborists in pace with the latest discoveries about trees, soils, chemicals, insects, diseases and the many techniques of arboriculture. It is also essential to maintain arborist certification and to keep employees up-to-date with state and local laws, or regulations resulting from such federal legislation as the Environmental Pesticide Act and the Occupational Safety Health Act.

Perhaps most importantly, continuing education boosts morale. Everyone from the worker who feeds limbs into a chipper to the experienced foreman who has a desire for advancement and the chance to learn and to grow as an individual. Continuing education is the key to these opportunities and at the same time can help build pride, contribute to safety, increase job satisfaction, and reduce turnover.

Communities providing continuing education for tree workers can qualify for points toward a Tree City USA Growth Award. Contact your state forest service or the Arbor Day Foundation for an application form and complete list of qualifying activities.
Confessions of the Editor

It happened in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, usually in the early morning hours while most people slept and traffic was light. It was always in the better sections of town, at least by my standards as a college student. Slowly I would crease the tree-lined streets, eyes scanning the trees of the houses I passed. Occasionally I would pull over and jot down a house number.

Later that day I knocked on the door, introducing myself as a forestry student who needed to earn money. It was a good opener. At the same time I would hand them a business card I had printed down on Main Street in Morgantown. While they studied the card, I would say that one of their trees looked like it should be taken down. My friends and I would do the job — and a sum was suggested.

Boy, did it work. We never lacked for jobs. Maybe it was my honest looks, or perhaps it was our clever card with the words Fully Insured right in the corner. I’m still not sure what that meant, but my partner, who owned our little “company” by virtue of owning the pickup and our only chainsaw, said we were covered. No one asked for details.

We were conscientious lads and worked hard. I got ten percent for landing the job, plus wages for working on it. I worked fast so I could locate more jobs and collect more bonuses. Nice system. If someone paid in advance, we’d work even faster and be gone before we hardly began.

Removals were our favorite jobs. There were plenty of tense moments as limbs were lowered gingerly between power lines. There was excitement, too, as we’d hang on and swing back and forth after topping a big one, or as limbs came crashing down between houses. Just the sort of adventure made for a forestry student. Pruning was less fun and it brought more complaints. No one seemed sure what a good pruning job should look like, and our decisions were bashed largely on where we could climb with our spikes and bolt without killing ourselves. Years later I was to learn there are actually guidelines and reasons behind pruning shade trees, but that wasn’t part of our forestry education and it really wasn’t of much interest to me.

Disposal of limbs was another challenge. Our mode of operation called for finding an empty lot somewhere, or a stretch of road with a pullout and no houses. Sometimes this part of the job took place after dark.

We even planted some trees, as long as the people were happy with native species. Whatever the customer wanted, we would find somewhere in the nearest woods or grow over fields. Our eyes were sharper than our saws and about who owned the land. Most of the time the tree would live and we even replaced some that died if we were still doing jobs in the neighborhood.

Looking back, I confess two things. First, that we made a lot of money. Second, that our clients were not well served. Not that many were unhappy. After all, they paid us far less than they would have paid a legitimate tree-care company. But few knew the risk they took, and I doubt that our pruning or planting jobs stood against the tests of time. We also did the pruned trees no good with our climbing spikes, and I know that some elderly folks, especially, were frightened into having trees taken out that, in fact, were not the danger to life or property that we made them out to be. So, I’m not proud of those early days in my career, but I do know that if the best game wardens are former poachers, then I am in a good position to present some useful insights about hiring an arborist. Perhaps this issue of the Bulletin will help repay a debt to society.

What Is an Arborist?

Arborists are the men and women who make a career of caring for the urban forest. Some arborists are self-employed, others work for tree-care companies. Still others work for municipalities, utility companies or on college campuses. Some serve as consultants to planners, developers, insurance companies, public agencies and attorneys. For whoever they work, arborists are professionals concerned primarily with the planting and care of trees. Although not all arborists possess all the skills, the areas in which they can help you include: planting, transplanting, pruning, fertilizing, pest management, and an army of other tree-care practices. Most arborists are also skilled in tree removal and value appraisals.

Consulting arborists are a bit different. These experts offer advice, but usually not the actual tree services. They specialize in tree appraisals, diagnosing problems, recommending treatments and suggesting where to obtain competent service. They are often the "second opinion" before deciding on tree work, or the legal expert in court cases. As independent consultants, they are often called on the same way a financial planner is called on to map financial strategy rather than using a stockbroker, insurance agent or other financial professional who sells a product.

In this bulletin, we focus on the commercial arborist — the person you would turn to when hiring a specialist to work on the trees around your home or business, and to handle a removal if necessary. These professionals are educated in arboriculture — the art and science of planning, caring for and maintaining trees — or sometimes in the related fields of urban forestry, landscape architecture, horticulture and others. A qualified arborist can serve you in meeting any of the needs shown on page 2 or 3 and at other times you need advice or service related to trees.
So, You Need an Arborist…

Hiring a tree care specialist deserves all the consideration and caution that goes into selecting a banker or home builder.

Twelve Tips for Selecting an Arborist

1. Check 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 listed on our Web site (arboret.org/bulletin). Membership does not guarantee quality, but lack of membership costs doubt on the person’s professionalism.

7. Never let yourself be rushed by haggiers (“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.).

A mistake can be expensive and long-lasting, but the right choice can assure health, beauty and longer life for your trees.

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 Workbook, former urban forester Steve Sandholt and arborist/company president Edwin Bunker 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 ½ 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 grading 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 live 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, urban forester, path 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.

Like a Good Haircut…

Remember at first glance a well-groomed 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.