How to Select an Arborist or Tree Service

Storm Damage Series #2

As storm cleanup progresses, Nebraska communities deal with the problem of removing and repairing severely damaged, surviving trees. In most cases, this work should be done by professional arborists.

Hiring an arborist deserves careful consideration. A qualified arborist will do tree work properly and safely. An unqualified person may damage the tree further and more importantly, may not be insured, leaving the liability burden to the client. This liability can run into tens of thousands of dollars.

Here are points to consider when hiring an arborist:

- **Check the phone directory's Yellow Pages or do an Internet search on "Tree Service" for a listing of businesses that do tree work in your area**. A listing in a directory indicates some degree of permanence. Also check company websites for association memberships, licenses held and insurance information.

- **Be cautious of any arborist who advertises "topping" as a service**. Topping, as defined by the International Society of Arboriculture, is the "indiscriminate cutting of branches to stubs or lateral branches that are not large enough to assume the terminal role." **Topping is not an approved tree maintenance practice**. Other names for it are "heading," "tipping," and "rounding over."

- **Ask for proof of certification by either the Nebraska Arborists Association or the International Society of Arboriculture**. Certification is not required by the State of Nebraska, but it indicates that the arborist has a high degree of knowledge.

- **If the arborist is not certified, determine if he or she is a member of any professional organizations, such as the Nebraska Arborists Association, the International Society of Arboriculture or the National Arborists Association**. Membership

Chain saw work and removing branches that can't be reached from the ground should be done only by professional arborists.

Reputable arborists will not "top" a tree. It spurs growth of epicormic shoots and robs a tree of the ability to produce food.

in professional groups does not guarantee quality, but indicates professional commitment.

- **Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage and workers' compensation**. Contact the insurance company to make sure the policy is current. Under some circumstances, you can be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property or damages a neighbor's property.

- **Ask for local references**. Take a look at some of the work and, if possible, talk with former clients. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.

- **Don't rush into a decision just because you are promised a discount if you sign an agreement now**. Be sure you understand what work is to be done and the cost. It's generally not a good idea to pay in full until the work is finished.

- **Most reputable tree care companies have all the work they can handle without going door-to-door**. People who aren't competent arborists may solicit tree work after storms, seeing an opportunity to earn quick money. Storm damage creates high-risk situations for both workers and property. Legitimate arborists never ask for payment in advance.

- **If possible, get more than one estimate for the work to be done**.

- **A conscientious arborist will not use climbing spikes except when removing a tree**. They open unnecessary wounds that can lead to decay.

- **Good tree work is not inexpensive**. A good arborist must carry several kinds of insurance and pay for expensive, specialized equipment. Beware of estimates that fall well below the average. There may be hidden costs or the arborist may not be fully insured or trained.

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Above: Reputable arborists carry insurance and use expensive, specialized equipment.

Below: Professional arborists won't use climbing spikes or improper bracing or pruning techniques, all of which will harm a tree.

This series is based on a previous storm damage series researched and written by David Mooter.

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