

Buyer Beware When Purchasing Tree Care

Fall and winter storms often bring out the best in a community. Neighbors, even strangers, help each other cope with aggravations and property damage left in the wake of a storm.

Unfortunately, storms also bring out the worst in a community – fast-buck artists looking to profit from the misfortunes of others. How can homeowners protect themselves when they need to hire a tree care company to clean up after a storm?

“With thousands of dollars at stake, not to mention the integrity and appearance of your property and your personal safety, make sure you investigate before deciding which company you should hire,” warns Tchukki Andersen, BCMA, staff arborist with the Tree Care Industry Association.

If the “professional arborist” you hired to remove a tree drops it on your house instead of your lawn, it’s too late to confirm the company is insured.

“Disreputable companies are renowned for ripping gutters off, breaking fences and bird baths, and even dropping trees on houses,” says Andersen. “Then they typically fold up and leave, never to be seen again.”

Disreputable companies tend to:

- Solicit work door-to-door
- Demand payment in advance
- Advertise topping
- Sell jobs without producing a written estimate or work order

Start with the arborists listed in the phone book or on the Internet. Don’t place much emphasis on the size of the Yellow Pages ad – some of the most reputable firms rely almost entirely on word-of-mouth advertising. Look instead for what the ad tells you about the company: number of years in business, professional affiliations, licenses, Accreditation, certification, etc. Avoid companies that advertise topping, an injurious and unacceptable practice. You should be aware that the credentials of someone calling himself or herself an arborist can vary widely. Don’t just hire someone with a chain saw who knocks on your door. Look for the company displaying the credentials of a professional.

When you meet with the arborist:

- Ask to see current certificates of liability and workers’ compensation insurance, if applicable.
- Ask for local references, and check on the quality of their work and level of service.
- Verify professional affiliations the company might have, such as membership or Accreditation with the Tree Care Industry Association.
- Don’t be lured by a bargain and don’t pay in advance.
- Insist on a signed contract as to cost, dates when work is to be performed, and exactly what is to be done.
- Insist that climbing spikes are used only if the tree is to be cut down; they damage the tree.
- Get a second opinion if it will add to your comfort level. Make sure that a complete diagnosis of the potential for tree failure is performed before a tree is removed.

What can you do?

Find a professional. A professional arborist can assess your landscape and work with you to determine the best salt-resistant trees and shrubs to plant and to care for your existing landscape. Contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture since 1938. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA has the nation’s only Accreditation program that helps consumers find tree care companies that have been inspected and accredited based on: adherence to industry standards for quality and safety; maintenance of trained, professional staff; and dedication to ethics and quality in business practices. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the “Locate Your Local TCIA Member Companies” program. You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP Code search on www.treecaretips.org.

*Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact editor@tcia.org
TCIA arborists, safety and business professionals are also available as sources for tree related articles and issues: 1-800-733-2622 or andersen@tcia.org.*