

Home Inspections Outside the House

Imagine settling on a nice new home and a few weeks later having the large old oak tree fall on your house. Or maybe being informed by an arborist that an old poplar tree is dangerous because of root rot and it will cost \$6,000 to have it removed and hauled away.

“Wouldn’t it be better to know the condition of large trees on a property before the purchase & sales agreement is executed?” asks Tchukki Andersen, staff arborist with the Tree Care Industry Association. “When homebuyers contemplate owning a home for many years, the quality and safety of the trees is usually overlooked in the negotiation.”

There are many things to consider when assessing the trees and landscaping on a property that many homeowners don’t think about until there is a serious problem. Some of these concerns include: improper planting of the trees; too much mulch on the root system; damage during construction; wrong tree in the wrong place; poor past care or previous topping; insect or disease damage; overwatering from the lawn’s irrigation system; limbs rubbing on the siding or roof.

All of these things can be dealt with after the purchase, but it can be expensive. According to Lew Bloch, a registered consulting arborist in Potomac, Md., “Large trees are usually an asset and a valuable amenity to the property, but weak, damaged or diseased trees are actually liabilities.”

“If a large tree has a serious defect, removal may be the best option,” advises Andersen. “Quite often these defects are hidden from view as they may be underground in the roots or they could be hidden in the tree trunk. Depending on the location of the tree as well as other situations, this cost can be in the thousands of dollars.”

An even more serious situation may be that hidden defects are so serious in the roots or tree trunk that the tree falls over without any warning. This could happen during a severe weather event or even on a calm day. It could cause heavy property damage or personal injury or fatalities. If your tree falls on a neighboring home, there may even be a negligence lawsuit.

Therefore, before purchasing a home with large trees, it would be prudent and wise to have the trees inspected by an experienced arborist. Most home inspection companies do not even look at the trees or have the expertise to analyze them. An experienced arborist can often detect the hidden problems mentioned above and outline remedies.

“Obviously dead or declining trees are easy to spot – at least when leaves are out,” says Bloch. “Otherwise healthy-looking trees with structural defects, however, require a professional diagnosis.”

A professional arborist can also advise the new home purchaser about future maintenance the trees will need and how to care for them.

Find a professional

A professional arborist can assess your landscape and work with you to determine the best course of action. Contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a 71-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA also 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 at www.treecaretips.org.

Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact editor@tcia.org.