



## Don't Do Disservice To Your Trees: How To Select An Arborist or Tree Service

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Whether you call them urban trees, urban-interface trees, shade trees, or just trees in your front yard, today's urban forests are perhaps playing a more important role than at any time previously. According to Nowak and Greenfield ([http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr\\_nrs58.pdf](http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr_nrs58.pdf)), urban trees provide the following benefits:

- Air pollution removal
- Carbon storage and sequestration
- Surface air temperature reduction
- Reduced building energy use
- Absorption of ultraviolet radiation
- Improved water quality
- Reduced noise pollution
- Improved human comfort
- Increased property value
- Improved human physiological and psychological well-being
- Improved aesthetics
- Improved community cohesion

A recent study in Tennessee estimated each of the 284 million urban trees in the state account for \$2.25 worth of measurable economic benefits each year. For those of you without a calculator handy, that's \$639 million dollars per

year (<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/jobs-and-economy/2012/04/high-cost-losing-urban-trees/1716/>).

Mississippi's urban forests contain an estimated 102.8 million trees, which store about

"urban jungle". In fact, with urbanization on the rise it is likely that urban trees provide just about the only Nature that many people experience in their day-to-day lives. Many forest health threats can impact urban and urban-interface trees just as severely



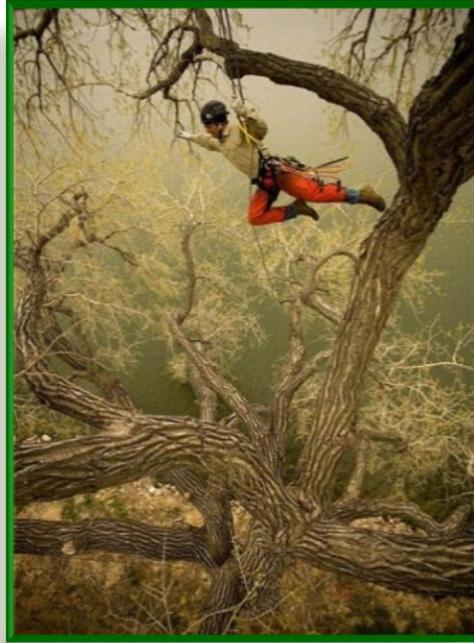
19.6 million metric tons of carbon (\$446.9 million), remove about 647,000 metric tons of carbon (\$14.8 million) per year, and mitigate approximately 18,990 metric tons of air pollution (\$161.2 million) annually ([http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr\\_nrs58.pdf](http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr_nrs58.pdf)). All of these benefits make it abundantly apparent that trees are an integral part of life in the

as trees in forest stands. Some problems in particular are actually more apparent in isolated, open grown urban specimens. Coupled with the fact that many individual urban trees are very valuable, proper management of urban trees is often of critical concern to many property owners and managers.

Many entrepreneurial people have identified this need, and are in the business of providing tree management services to urban property owners and managers. Many of them are well educated, trained, insured, and provide a valuable and necessary service. Others are shady (no pun intended), fly-by-night, dishonest, and downright detrimental to urban trees. While insects and diseases are important pests of urban trees, overall health and appearance of urban trees can often suffer as much or more to the person holding the pruning saw.

Recently, a person was knocking on doors up and down my street in Starkville, MS. Several homeowners allowed numerous beautiful and by all appearances healthy yard trees to be removed (most were cut to merchantable length and loaded onto a truck, presumably to take to market). Other homeowners allowed the individual to climb their healthy yard trees using climbing spikes for an "inspection", which invariably ended with the operator claiming the "tree had worms".

The fact of the matter is, a qualified professional will perform tree work properly and safely, but an unqualified person may further damage the tree, and more importantly may not be insured, leaving the liability burden to the client.



*Many arborists are professional tree climbers, and use specialized climbing equipment to protect the tree as well as themselves.*

*Photo Credit: John Evans:  
<http://www.adventure-journal.com/2010/03/the-greenest-job-might-be-professional-tree-climber/>*

The first question you should ask yourself is:

*Does my tree need preventative or corrective maintenance or removal?*

(Adapted from [http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/environmental/hiring\\_a\\_n\\_arborist\\_flier\\_final.pdf](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/environmental/hiring_a_n_arborist_flier_final.pdf))

- Here are some signs that you should consult a reputable professional:
  - Dead branches in the tree or on the ground
  - Crown dieback
  - Mushrooms near the base of the tree
  - Excessive leaf loss or dead leaves

- Areas of rotten wood or cavities
- Noticeable change in the leaning of the tree
- "Bracket", "shelf" or konks fungi on the trunk
- Slime fluxes "bleeding" from the tree
- If a dead or dying tree is on your property, you should remove it immediately if it is a danger to your property or people. Before you cut it down, make sure the tree isn't on an easement or other protected land. If the tree is near a powerline, contact the utility company and have them examine the tree first: **DO NOT TRY TO REMOVE A TREE NEAR POWERLINES YOURSELF!**
- If a dead or dying tree isn't a danger to people, utility infrastructure or property, you can leave it on your property. Dead trees provide wildlife habitat.

Once you have identified the need for preventative and/or corrective management or tree removal, it is important to keep your wits about you and consider the following guidelines (adapted from <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5291.html>).

*Who should I hire to manage or remove my urban tree?*

(Adapted from <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5291.html>)

- Check your telephone directory's yellow pages

under "Tree Service" for a listing of those businesses which do tree work in your area. While anyone can list themselves in the phone book, a listing indicates at least some degree of permanence.

- **Be cautious of any professional that advertises or recommends "topping" as a service. "Topping", or removing the upper portion of a tree in hopes that the tree will recover, is not an approved tree maintenance practice.**
- Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage and worker's compensation. Then, 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 if the worker 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 professional.
- 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 for what amount of money. It is generally not a good

idea to pay in full until the work is completed.

- 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 professionals never ask for payment in advance.
- In most cases get more than one estimate and let each contractor know you are soliciting for other bids.
- A conscientious professional will not use climbing spikes except when removing a tree. Climbing spikes open unnecessary wounds that could lead to decay.
- Arborists use specialized equipment.
- Good tree work is not inexpensive. A good professional must carry several kinds of insurance as well as pay for expensive and specialized equipment. Beware of estimates that fall well below the average. There may be hidden costs or the professional may not be fully insured or trained.
- Ask if the arborist is a licensed Mississippi Tree Surgeon or certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). To carry the title of "Tree

Surgeon" in Mississippi, an operator must have passed licensing exams with the Mississippi Bureau of Plant Industry (MBPI), and has demonstrated a minimum level of competence. The MBPI keeps a record of tree surgeons who are licensed and insured. A list of licensed tree surgeons is available to the public upon request. Certification by the ISA is not required by the state of Mississippi, but it is advisable to seek out professionals who are ISA certified. ISA certification indicates that the arborist has a high degree of knowledge and experience relating to tree health management. You can find a list of certified arborists in your area at:

- <http://www.isa-arbor.com/faca/findArborist.aspx>
- If few professionals in your area are certified, or more specifically if the professional you are considering is not certified, determine if he/she is a member of any professional organizations. Membership in professional organizations does not guarantee quality, but does indicate professional commitment.

### *What should I do before hiring someone?*

- Get more than one estimate and don't always accept the lowest bid.
- Make sure to get the contract in writing and read

the contract carefully. Does the contract cover everything promised and include a plan?

- Beware of individuals who go door-to-door offering bargains and don't be afraid to ask for proof of certification and insurance.
- Find out who is responsible for disposing of the entire tree, including limbs and debris. Will the stump be removed?

**For additional information contact:**

Mississippi Forestry  
Commission [Local Office](#)

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