

Why hire an arborist?

The benefits of having an arborist care for your trees

Arboriculture, in relation to this information sheet, is the selection, planting and care of trees in the urban landscape. An arborist is a specialist in the care of trees. Arborists are knowledgeable about the cultural and environmental requirements of specific trees and are trained and equipped to provide appropriate and timely care. Proper tree care is an investment that can lead to substantial returns.

Well-cared-for trees are attractive and can add considerable value to your property. The benefits provided by trees are directly related to their age and size, therefore any tree care activity that supports tree health and structural stability leads to sustainability. Poorly maintained trees can be a significant liability. The arboricultural industry has created standards that guide the way that tree maintenance activities are undertaken in Australia, for example AS4373 Pruning of amenity trees, and arborists are familiar with the application of these standards in the urban forest.

Tree development changes over time as it grows and tree maintenance programs should reflect the life stage that the tree is in. (Harris, Clark, & Matheny, 2004). The prevention of tree stresses brought about by inappropriate management is far more beneficial to the tree as it is difficult to correct the problem or arrest decline. Tree care is a long-term, low intensity process (Harris, Clark, & Matheny, 2004). Tree maintenance programs should endeavour to minimise dramatic change to the tree or its growing environment. An arborist can provide advise on how to avoid significant changes to the trees growing environment or inappropriate management that can predispose a tree to stress and decline.

Pruning or removing trees, especially large trees, can also be dangerous work. Only those trained and equipped to work safely in trees should undertake tree work.

Tree owners that get arborists to undertake tree work on their trees and arborists that undertake either pruning or removal of trees need to be aware and check for necessary permits and licenses. Some governmental agencies require contractors to apply for permits and/or to apply for a planning permit before they are able to work. Be sure they comply with any local, state, or national laws that govern their work.

Services that arborists can provide

Planting

Arborists can select, plant and provide establishment maintenance for trees. Arborists have an understanding of the environmental and cultural conditions for a tree and which species are able to meet the aesthetic, biological and functional requirements of the planting site. This includes selecting trees that are drought tolerant.

The wrong tree in the wrong location could lead to future problems as a result of limited growing space, poor growing conditions leading to pest and diseases, or poor growth (ISA, 2007).

Arborists can provide advice on strategic placement of trees in the landscape in order to gain the most benefit from climate modification a tree can provide.

Pruning

An arborist can determine the type of pruning necessary to maintain or improve the health, appearance, and safety of trees. Arborists can carry out timely, high quality pruning programs that are beneficial and not deleterious to your tree.

Trees are pruned to:

- Shape young trees to promote structurally sound branching for the future.
- Maintain the health, structure and appearance.
- Control plant size and provide appropriate clearances.
- Reduce the potential risk to public safety and property damage.
- In response to unexpected events or emergencies, such as tree or branch failure resulting from severe storms.
- All tree pruning is to comply with AS4373 Pruning of amenity trees.

Tree removal

Although tree removal should be considered as a last resort, there are circumstances when it is necessary. An arborist will investigate all tree management options prior to the recommendation for tree removal.

Tree removal is an acceptable management option in the urban forest when required for human health and safety, to protect infrastructure, to facilitate approved development and infrastructure improvements, to maintain a healthy and aesthetically pleasing urban forest or for ecological restoration.

Arborists have the skills and equipment to safely and efficiently remove trees.

Emergency tree care

Storms can cause limbs or entire trees to fall, which can get caught up in other trees or land on buildings, other structures and cars. The weight of storm-damaged trees can be great, and they can also be dangerous to remove or trim. An arborist can assist in performing the job in a safe manner, while reducing further risk of damage to property (ISA, 2007).

Other Services

Arborists also provide a variety of other tree care services, including;

Plant Health Care, a concept of preventive maintenance to keep trees in good health, which will help the tree better defend itself against insects, disease, and site problems, which can include fertilisation, soil amelioration, mulching and aeration to improve root growth.

- Spraying or injecting to control certain insect and disease problems.
- Cabling or bracing for added support to branches with weak attachment.
- Provision of reports for planning, risk management, and tree management plans.

Selecting the right Arborist for the job

Consider the following when selecting an arborist;

- An arborist is an individual who is trained in the art and science of planting, caring for, and maintaining trees in the urban landscape. Check for their qualifications and experience.
- Check for membership in professional organizations such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Such membership demonstrates a willingness on the part of the arborist to stay up to date on the latest techniques and information.
- Ask for proof of insurance and then phone the insurance company if you are not satisfied. A reputable arborist carries personal and property damage insurance as well as workers compensation insurance. Homeowners may have to pay out large amounts of money for damages caused by uninsured individuals claiming to be tree experts.
- Check for necessary permits and licenses. Some governmental agencies require contractors to apply for permits and/or to apply for a license before they are able to work. Be sure they comply with any local, or state laws that govern their work.
- Ask for references to find out where the company has done work similar to the work you are requesting. Don't hesitate to check references or visit other work sites where the company or individual has done tree work.
- Get more than one quotation, unless you know and are comfortable with the arborist. Don't always accept the low quote. You should examine the credentials and the written specifications of the firms that submitted quotes and determine the best combination of price, work to be done, skill, and professionalism to protect your trees.
- Good arborists will perform only accepted practices. For example, practices such as lopping or topping a tree, removing an excessive amount of live wood, using climbing spurs on trees that are not being removed, and removing or disfiguring living trees without just cause are unnecessary. Improper tree care can take many years to correct itself and, in some cases, it can never be corrected.

Get it in writing. Most reputable arborists have their clients sign a contract. Be sure to read the contract carefully. Don't be afraid to ask questions, such as;

- When will the work be started and completed?
- Who will be responsible for clean up?
- What does the total price include?
- If I would like more to be done, what is your hourly rate?

One of the best methods to use in choosing an arborist is to educate yourself on some of the basic principles of tree care. The internet, professional organizations like the International Society of Arboriculture, your local garden centre, or city arborists are also excellent sources of information if you should have further questions.

References

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