

How to Choose an Arborist?

by: Lesley Bruce Smith, ISA Certified Arborist
Mother Natures Moment, September 2019

A few years ago I addressed this question but I figured it was time for an update.

When choosing someone to trim your mature woody plants, a.k.a. trees and shrubs, it is important to have a few questions top of mind.



Gilbert A Smith, ISA Board Certified Master Arborist climbing and trimming a Burr Oak tree in the winter.

Should you pick the big franchise company, your landscaper or the guy or gal you saw down the street with the truck and chainsaw?

The very first thing you should insist on is hiring an **ISA** (*International Society of Arboriculture*) *Certified Arborist*. This is not a guarantee for good trimming but it would definitely be a minimum starting place. The big franchise experience could be great or it could be a big bust depending on **who** is actually doing the trimming. Will the salesperson who seemed to be able to answer all your questions be on site, or will it be someone several tiers removed, who may not have the level of expertise and experience for which you are hoping.

I would generally avoid landscape companies to do tree trimming, with rare exceptions they are ignorant of horticultural practices that help woody plants (aka: trees and shrubs) This is very sad, but in our experience, very true, unless they have certified arborists doing the tree trimming, which I have yet to encounter.

Next you should ask "**how**" they trim. Over the years Arborsmith has written and published dozens of *Arborsmith Abstracts™* that help to answer that question and explain why! They should use sterile trimming techniques, and they should know why that it is important. They should NEVER use spikes in a living tree because it is very damaging and spreads disease. They generally should not remove more than a third of the branches, preferably less when trimming and they should refrain from "lion's tailing" which is a damaging practice that takes almost all the branches out of the middle of the tree, leaving only branches at the terminal ends. This practice which we are seeing more and more, can significantly weaken a tree, leaving it open to storm damage or wind throw in the future. We find it is used by trimmers who do not have good climbing skills, and or do not know much about horticulture. Every person with a saw in your trees should know **why** they are doing what they are doing and be able to explain it. Good arborists should welcome your questions about both their experience and expertise, and also their practices aloft.

It is very important to ***insist on an original certificate of insurance!!*** Low bid is kind of a moot point if you have a tree ***in*** your bedroom or over your garage or worse an injured worker on your property with no health care coverage, for which you could be liable. Having insurance in our industry is expensive, but it is a sign that the company cares, not just about you, but about their staff as well.

Finally, we specialize in saving and maintaining trees and although we do have to remove trees from time to time as a service to our clients, it is not something we advertise or enjoy doing. **You want a firm that loves trees, not one that loves taking them down!** So here's to happy trees and a healthy canopy.