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Fall Is A Great Time to Prune

You may think that the approach of the end of the growing season means you can stop worrying about the trees in your landscape. Think again! Fall is one of the best times to examine the safety and health of your trees, say experts in tree care. Why? With the leaves off, cracks, defects and deadwood are easier to see. Also, with winter storms approaching, hazards should be removed now – before they damage property.

“Most trees can be pruned year-round,” says Peter Gerstenberger, senior advisor for safety, standards & compliance for the Tree Care Industry Association. “And certain operations are easier to do in the fall, when dead branches are easily seen and removed.”

Some homeowners worry that arborists will not be able to determine deadwood on a tree when the leaves are off. “On the contrary,” says Gerstenberger. “This is the best time for an arborist to locate deadwood by looking for changes in color, fungus growth, cracks, and other symptoms that can help them make this determination. Since the leaves are off, the view of the entire tree’s architecture is clear and a thorough check can be performed.”

Pruning is much more than the simple act of sawing off limbs. Proper pruning is an art based on scientific principles of plant physiology. At its most basic level, pruning trees involves removing damaged, dead or structurally weak limbs, which will improve a tree’s health and reduce the chances of personal or property damage caused by falling limbs.

Professional arborists have the capability to make the tree safer and more attractive by pruning live growth as well. Proper pruning encourages growth, increases flower and fruit production, improves plant health, repairs damage and helps add aesthetic appeal to a tree. Pruning at the right time and in the right way is critical, since it is possible to kill a tree through neglect or over-pruning.

How can a homeowner know if an arborist will prune a tree correctly?

“Ask the arborist if they prune according to the American National Standards Institute standard for tree pruning, which is called ANSI A300,” says Gerstenberger.

This standard requires that the recommended use of certain tools, cutting techniques, and pruning methods be followed, and sets the standard definitions for terms the arborist will use in your estimate. Properly written work estimates for tree pruning should be written in accordance to ANSI A300 standards.

In addition to the information given on the work estimate, ANSI A300 sets some guidelines for basic pruning practices that arborists should follow. If arborist are adhering to the ANSI A300 pruning standard, they:

- will not leave branch stubs
- will make few or no heading cuts
- will not cut off the branch collar (not make a flush cut)
- will not top or lion’s tail trees
- will not remove more than 25 percent of the foliage of a single branch
- will not remove more than 25 percent of the total tree foliage in a single year
- will not damage other parts of the tree during pruning
- will not use wound paint

Homeowners who would like a professional arborist to assess their trees should contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a 68-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 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 the TCIA Web site, www.treecareindustry.org.