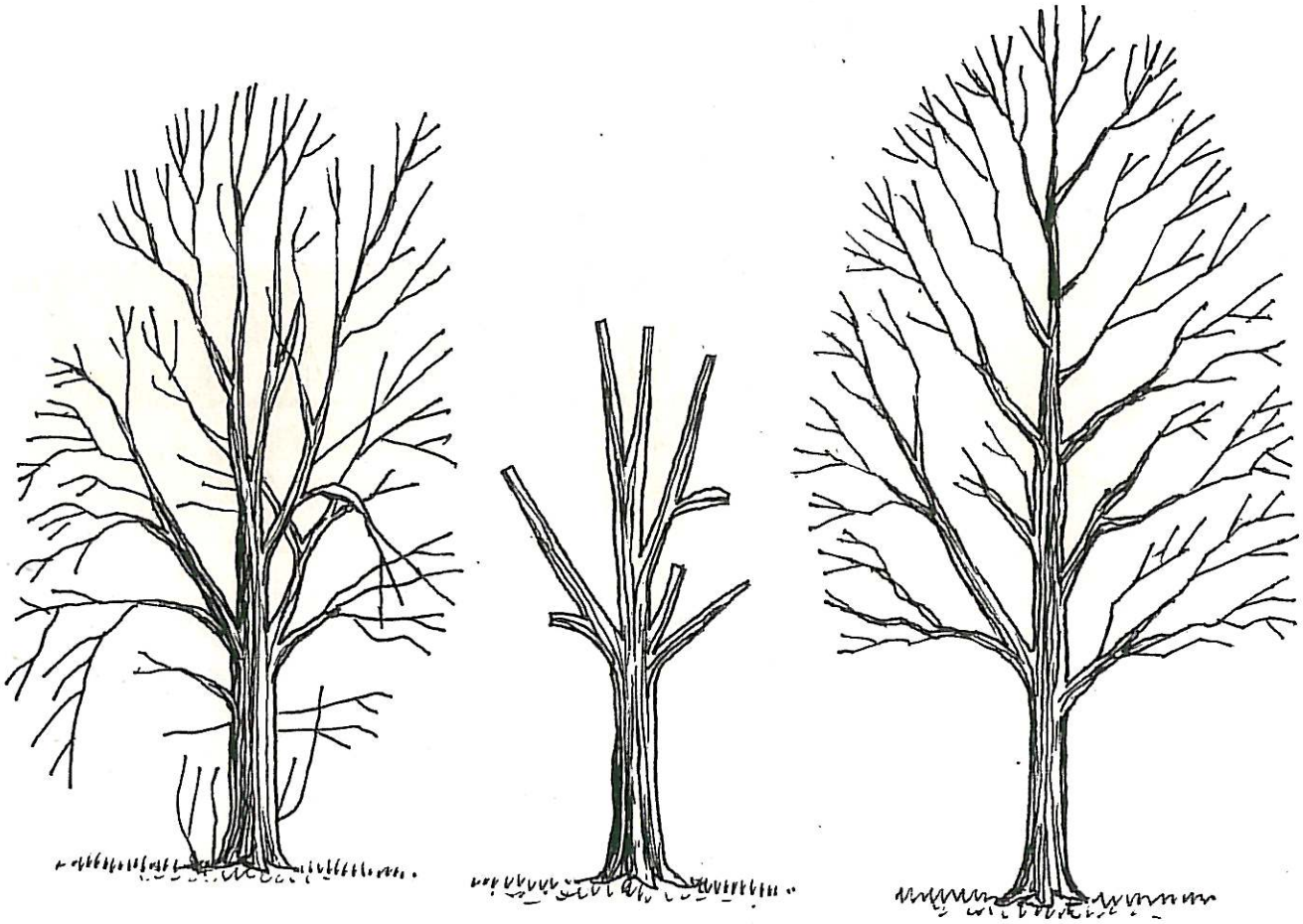
TREE CITY USA®
BULLETIN
No. 6
Dr. James R. Fazio, Editor • $3.00

How to Hire an Arborist

Around the home or along the avenue, trees are one of our most valuable assets. They are also a long-term investment. Like any investment our trees require careful decisions and the occasional advice and service of a professional. In the world of trees, arborists form the cadre of specialists who can safeguard your trees and save you from the long-term consequences of their neglect or the wrong decision. In this issue, learn how you can judge when to call an arborist and how to select the right one.



A neglected shade tree

The work of a poorly chosen "tree expert"

The work of a competent arborist

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When Do I Need an Arborist?

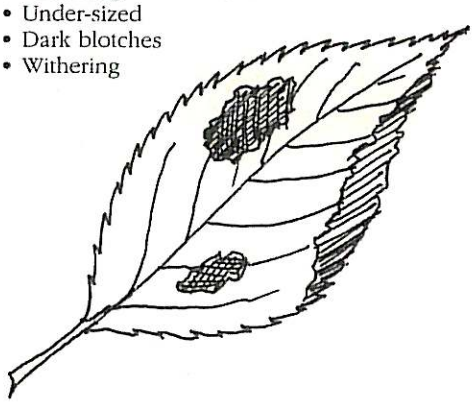
Do you own shade trees and care about their place in the future? Yes ❑ No ❑

Are your trees healthy and vigorous, but you are the kind of person who believes in preventing problems through planning? Yes ❑ No ❑

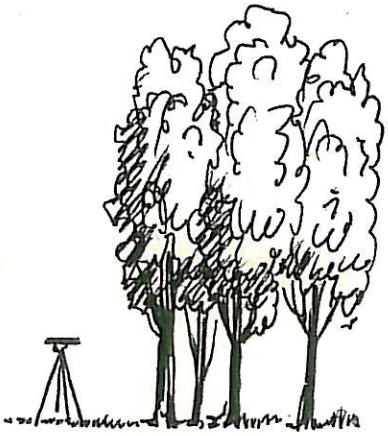
Are you experiencing any of the conditions shown below? Yes ❑ No ❑

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," the services of an arborist can help provide healthy trees and peace of mind.

Leaves don't look right?
- Yellowing
- Under-sized
- Dark blotches
- Withering

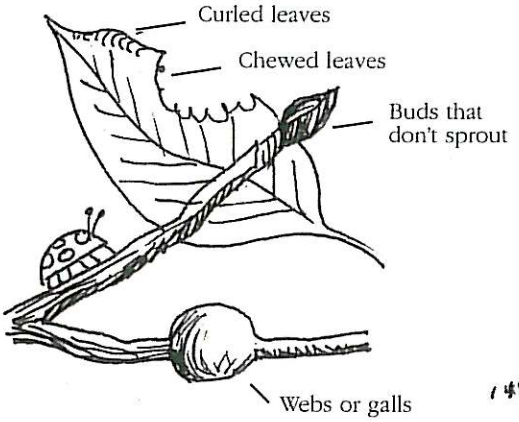


Are limbs dying at the ends?

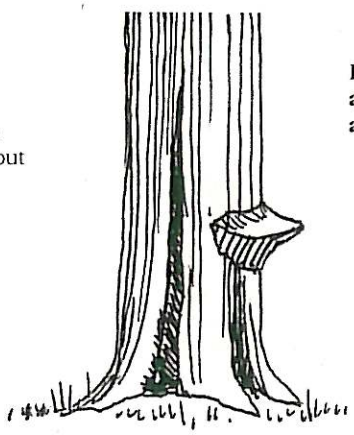


Do you plan to build on a lot with trees, and want to save some of them?

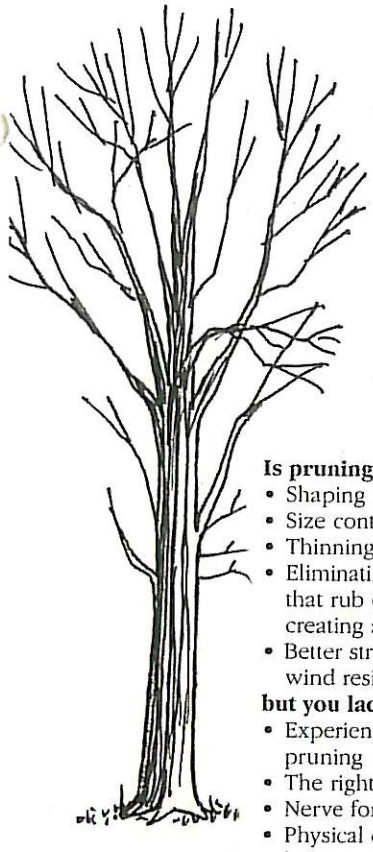
Are more than the usual number of insects noticeable, or do you see signs of their presence?



Are there cracks in the trunk, cankers growing on the bark, or mushrooms growing from the ground near the tree?

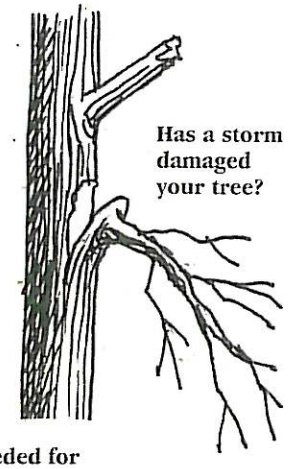


Is soil compaction apparent and aeration needed?



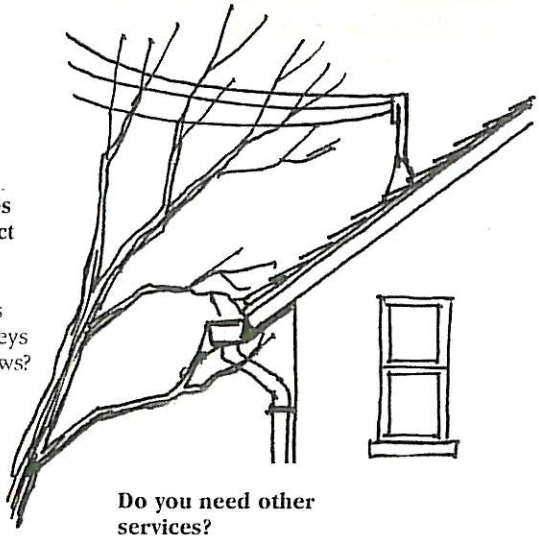
Is pruning needed for
- Shaping
- Size control
- Thinning branches
- Eliminating branches that rub or are creating a problem
- Better structure and wind resistance

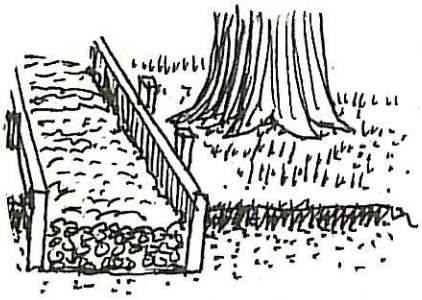
but you lack...
- Experience with pruning
- The right tools
- Nerve for heights
- Physical condition for hard work?



Has a storm damaged your tree?

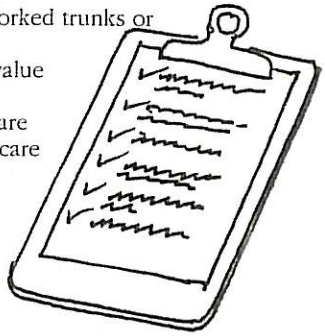
Are limbs in conflict with
- Wires
- Gutters
- Chimneys
- Windows?





Must roots be cut for a new sidewalk or building?

Do you need other services?
- Lightning protection systems
- Cabling of forked trunks or branches
- Appraising value
- Fertilizing
- Preventive care
- Annual tree care check-ups



International Society of Arboriculture

What Is an Arborist?

Arborists are the men and women who make a career of caring for the urban forest. Some arborists are self-employed, others work for tree care companies. Still others work for municipalities, utility companies or on college campuses. Some serve as consultants to planners, developers, insurance companies, public agencies and attorneys. For whoever they work, arborists are professionals concerned primarily with the planting and care of trees. Although not all arborists possess all skills, the areas in which they can help you include: planting, transplanting, pruning, fertilizing, pest management, and an array of other tree care practices. Most arborists are also skilled in tree removal and value appraisals.

Consulting arborists are a bit different. These experts offer advice, but usually not the actual tree services. They specialize in tree appraisals, diagnosing problems, recommending treatments and suggesting where to obtain competent service. They are often the "second opinion" before deciding on tree work, or the legal expert in court cases. As independent consultants, they are often called on the same way a financial planner is called on to map financial strategy rather than using a stockbroker, insurance agent or other financial professional who sells a product. See page 8 for directory information.

In this bulletin, we focus on the commercial arborist — the person you would turn to when hiring a specialist to work on the trees around your home or business, and to handle a removal if necessary. These professionals are educated in arboriculture — the art and science of planting, caring for and maintaining trees — or sometimes in the related fields of urban forestry, landscape architecture, horticulture and others. A qualified arborist can serve you in meeting any of the needs shown on page 2 or 3 and at other times you need advice or service related to trees.

So, You Need an Arborist...

Hiring a tree care specialist deserves all the consideration and caution that goes into selecting a banker or home builder. A mistake can be expensive and long-lasting, but the right choice can assure health, beauty and longer life for your trees.

Twelve Tips for Selecting an Arborist

1. Check in the phone directory, usually under Trees, Tree Service or Tree Care Service. Although anyone can list themselves in the yellow pages, a listing at least indicates some degree of permanence.

2. Beware of door-knockers. Most reputable companies have all the work they can handle without going door-to-door. Door-knockers are especially common after storms when non-professionals see a chance to earn some quick money. Often, storm damage creates high risk situations for both workers and homeowners, and there is opportunity for even more damage to trees and shrubs if work is not done correctly.

3. Find out if the arborist is certified through a local certification program or the International Society of Arboriculture. ISA's program is available to arborists nationwide and requires appropriate training, experience and knowledge as evidenced by successfully completing a standardized application and testing process. In some cities, arborists are required to have a license. Check with city hall, then use only an arborist who is in compliance if licensing is included in your community's ordinances.

4. Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage (such as your house and your neighbor's), and workman's compensation. Then phone the insurance company to make certain the policy is current. *Under some circumstances, you can be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property, or damage is done to a neighbor's property!*

5. Ask for local references — other jobs the company or individual has done. Take a look at some, and if possible, talk with the former client. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.

6. Determine if the arborist is a member of any of the organizations listed on our Web site **arborday.org/bulletins**. Membership does not guarantee quality, but lack of membership casts doubt on the person's professionalism.

7. Never let yourself be rushed by bargains ("If you sign an agreement today, I can take ten percent off the price..."). *Never pay in advance.*

8. Have more than one arborist look at your job and give you estimates. Don't expect one to lower a bid to match another's, and be willing to pay for the estimate if necessary; but two or more opinions and cost estimates are worth your extra effort.

9. A good arborist will offer a wide range of services (pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, lightning protection, pest control, etc.).

James R. Fazio

Avoid arborists who routinely top trees.

10. A good arborist will recommend topping a tree only under rare circumstances (such as to save the tree after severe physical damage to the crown, or for the decorative effect of pollarding in a formal setting or restricted space).

11. A conscientious arborist will not use climbing spikes if the tree is to remain in the landscape.

12. Beware of an arborist who is eager to remove a living tree. Removal clearly should be a last resort.

Price

Tree care costs money. But considering that trees can contribute up to 15 percent of your property value, the expense of proper care is one of the best investments you can make. Tree care, like personal health care, is not the place to cut corners.

Reputable arborists have made large investments in equipment and training. Trucks, hydraulic booms, chippers, sprayers, stump cutters and chainsaws represent major capital investments and maintenance costs. Labor, insurance, safety training and continuing education add to the overhead. The price charged for a job reflects all these costs as well as a reasonable margin of profit.

Remember that pruning is an art. The arborist's skill and professionalism may be more important than a low bid.

Here are two good ways to save on the cost of tree care:

$ Schedule your work well in advance, maybe as much as six months. Most arborists are busy, and many services must be done during a certain time of year. By allowing the company to schedule your work in advance and, if possible, when other work is at low ebb, you may be able to arrange a savings on price.

$ If you can get together with several neighbors who also need work done, you may be able to interest a company in a group discount.

The Agreement

To prevent misunderstandings and be assured of having your work performed to the standards you expect, a contract is the key. Most companies have their own form and the conditions included vary widely. Read the document carefully. If you have questions, a local forester, consulting arborist, or your attorney may be able to add clarification and valuable insights.

In an article that is part of American Forest's *Urban Forestry Home Workbook*, former urban forester Steve Sandfort and arborist/company president Edwin Butcher listed several key items that a contract should include:

- ☑ The dates that work will begin and end.
- ☑ Exactly what work will be done. For example, "prune all dead, dying, diseased and weak branches 1½ inches or greater in diameter." If your tree is to be sprayed, get a written statement detailing the specific insect or disease to be treated, the chemical to be used and how much, and what *you* need to do (cover lawn furniture, keep pets inside, etc.). If fertilizing is to be done, it should be stated how many pounds of fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter will be applied by what method.
- ☑ Specify what cleanup work will be done and when. Who gets any firewood, and if it is you, will it be cut into 16-inch lengths and stacked by the garage?
- ☑ Clarify if removal of a tree includes grinding out the stump and surface roots to one foot below grade, filling with topsoil and planting grass.
- ☑ The **total** dollar amount you will be charged. You don't want a surprise such as: "Here is the $300 I owe you for working on my five trees." "$300? Sorry, lady, that was $300 *per tree!*"
- ☑ Work is usually priced one of two ways: (a) as a single price for the job, or (b) on an hourly basis plus materials. When using the latter, be sure to include the wording, "...but not to exceed..."

And don't be shy about asking questions such as, "How do you make your pruning cuts?" or "How can I be sure that pedestrians and curious children will be kept safe?"

In short, be sure you have a contract that is complete and clear, and be satisfied in advance that your concerns will be dealt with fairly by the people you hire to work on your trees.

If a dispute does arise or you would like an expert to check the quality of work before you pay the bill, seek the services of a consulting arborist, urban forester, park or utility arborist, or similar specialist who is not in competition with the arborists you hired.

Use Arborists for Preventative Care

Some arborists offer inspections of your trees for a flat annual rate. This is an excellent way to have insect or disease problems diagnosed in time to take effective action. It can also assure light, early pruning that will prevent major, corrective pruning later on. Regular fertilizing, soil aeration, deep watering, and similar routine tasks will also help assure that your trees remain healthy. Sometimes this kind of inspection/preventative maintenance program is called Plant Health Care.

A Salute to Arborists

Arborists are among the hardest working people in America. Their work is physically demanding, often dangerous, and intellectually challenging. Their investments in equipment are great, and as the knowledge of trees and tree care continues to grow, their need for education never stops.

Arborists often donate their skills and services at Arbor Day events. Every day they are on the front line of educating the public about tree care. The men and women who devote their lives to arboriculture are the professional stewards of our communities' green treasures.

For young people who love trees and the outdoors, becoming an arborist is a career worth exploring. For those of us in other disciplines, arboriculture is a calling worthy of our respect and gratitude.

To the arborists of America from those of us who love trees — a big "thank you!"

Like a Good Haircut...

Remember at first glance a well-pruned tree often looks like no work was done at all, even after an arborist has spent a good amount of time removing numerous carefully selected branches. Like a good haircut.

International Society of Arboriculture

Confessions of the Editor

It happened in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, usually in the early morning hours while most people slept and traffic was light. It was always in the better sections of town, at least by my standards as a college student. Slowly I would cruise the tree-lined streets, eyes scanning the trees of the houses I passed. Occasionally I would pull over and jot down a house number.

Later that day I knocked on the doors, introducing myself as a forestry student who needed to earn money. It was a good opener. At the same time I would hand them a business card I had printed down on Main Street in Morgantown. While they studied the card, I would say that one of their trees looked like it should be taken down. My friends and I would do the job — and a sum was suggested.

Boy, did it work. We never lacked for jobs. Maybe it was my honest looks, or perhaps it was our clever cards with the words Fully Insured right in the corner. I'm still not sure what that meant, but my partner, who owned our little "company" by virtue of owning the pickup and our only chainsaw, said we were covered. No one asked for details.

We were conscientious lads and worked hard. I got ten percent for landing the job, plus wages for working on it. I worked fast so I could locate more jobs and collect more bonuses. Nice system. If someone paid in advance, we'd work even faster and be gone before we hardly began.

Removals were our favorite jobs. There were plenty of tense moments as limbs were lowered gingerly between power lines. There was excitement, too, as we'd hang on and sway back and forth after topping a big one, or as trunks came crashing down between houses. Just the sort of adventure made for a forestry student. Pruning was less fun and it brought more complaints. No one seemed sure what a good pruning job should look like, and our decisions were based largely on where we could climb with our spikes and belt without killing ourselves. Years later I was to learn there are actually guidelines and reasons behind pruning shade trees, but that wasn't part of our forestry education and it really wasn't of much interest to me.

Disposal of limbs was another challenge. Our mode of operation called for finding an empty lot somewhere, or a stretch of road with a pullout and no houses. Sometimes this part of the job took place after dark.

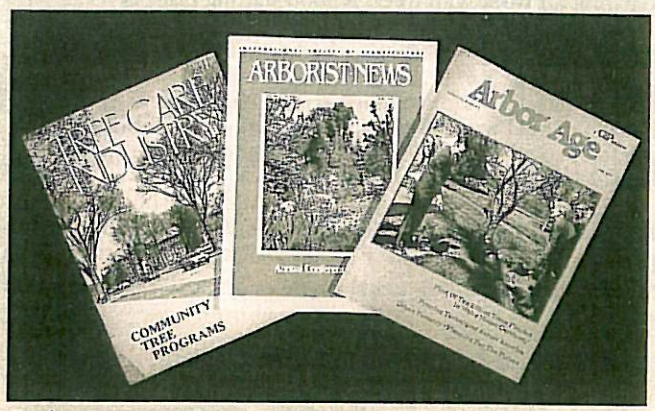
We even planted some trees, as long as the people were happy with native species. Whatever the customer wanted, we would find somewhere in the nearest woods or grown-over fields. Our eyes were sharper than our scruples about who owned the land. Most of the time the tree would live and we even replaced some that died if we were still doing jobs in the neighborhood.

Looking back, I confess two things. First, that we made a lot of money! Second, that our clients were not well served. Not that many were unhappy. After all, they paid us far less than they would have paid a legitimate tree care company. But few knew the risk they took, and I doubt that our pruning or planting jobs stood against the tests of time. We also did the pruned trees no good with our climbing spikes, and I know that some elderly folks, especially, were frightened into having trees taken out that, in fact, were not the danger to life or property that we made them out to be. So, I'm not proud of those early days in my career, but I do know that if the best game wardens are former poachers, then I am in a good position to present some useful insights about hiring an arborist. Perhaps this issue of the *Bulletin* will help repay a debt to society.

Randy Barger

Arborists and the Urban Forestry Program

Linda King



Employers can contribute to continuing education by making a variety of periodicals available to arborists.

Contracting Arborist Services

In municipalities not having their own tree care staff, contracting with local arborists is usually a better alternative than giving untrained employees from other departments the responsibility for care of the street and park trees. When contracting is used, each municipality has its standard forms and procedures. However, due to the unique nature and needs of tree care, there are special considerations worth noting. Most of the tips on pages 4 and 5 are just as applicable for a local government as they are for individual property owners. In addition, the following suggestions are offered:

- ☑ Since most contracts must be awarded to the lowest bidder, be sure to place adequate screening criteria in the work specifications. Examples include a minimum amount of insurance coverage and years of experience, evidence of equal opportunity hiring practices, etc.
- ☑ Be specific in how the tree care work is to be performed. Standards established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) are available on pruning. This document and a companion 'how-to' book, *Best Management Practices - Pruning*, are available from the International Society of Arboriculture (refer to **arborday.org/bulletins**).
- ☑ Require that the successful bidder possesses adequate equipment to do the job.
- ☑ Require that *all* work be listed that was done in the region and was over a certain dollar value. This enables an adequate check on past work performance, and prevents the bidder from listing only selected references that he or she knows will provide endorsements.
- ☑ Provide the contractor with a flier or information packet to distribute to homeowners in advance of any work done in their vicinity. This eliminates the surprise element and explains what kind of tree work will be done, why the work is necessary, and when crews will be in the area. Also include the name and phone number of the contractor or whoever should receive questions from the residents.
- ☑ Use newspaper and radio to announce contract awards and explain what tree work will be done.

Education and Continuing Education

Education as an arborist can begin with on-the-job training, an associates degree from a college or vocational technician's program, or a baccalaureate degree in urban forestry, horticulture or a related field. For anyone with an interest in the green industry, initial opportunities for education and entry into the profession present no barrier.

For the employers of arborists, both private and governmental, the challenge is in providing continuing education opportunities. Continuing education is essential for keeping arborists in pace with the latest discoveries about trees, soils, chemicals, insects, diseases and the many techniques of arboriculture. It is also essential to maintain arborist certification and to keep employees up to date with state and local laws, or regulations resulting from such federal legislation as the Environmental Pesticide Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Perhaps most importantly, continuing education boosts morale. Everyone from the worker who feeds limbs into a chipper to the experienced foreman has a desire for advancement and the chance to learn and to grow as an individual. Continuing education is the key to these opportunities and at the same time can help build pride, contribute to safety, increase job satisfaction, and reduce turnover.

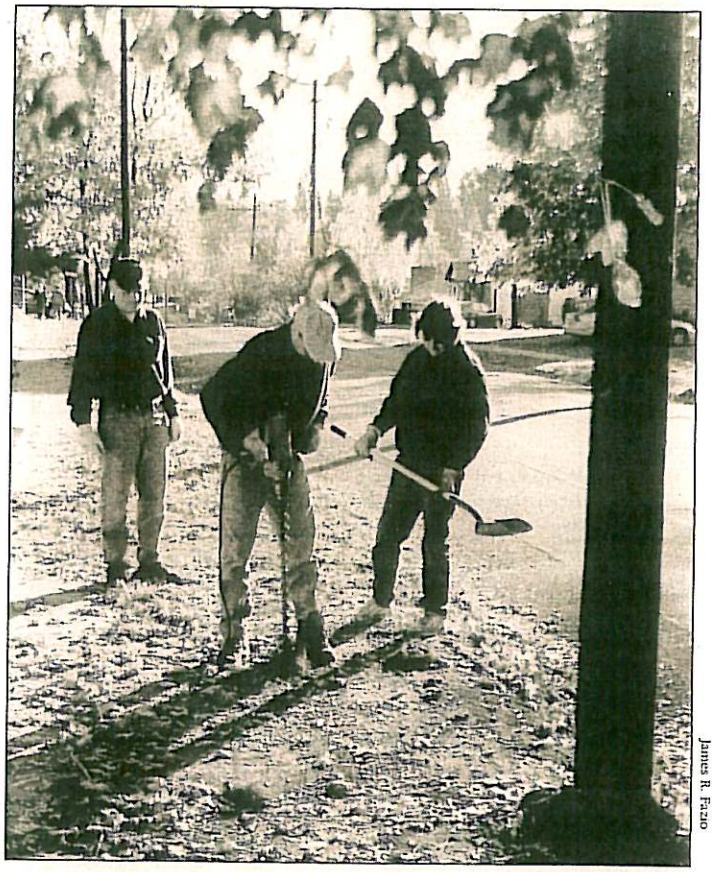
Communities providing continuing education for tree workers can qualify for points toward a Tree City USA Growth Award. Contact your state forester's office or the Arbor Day Foundation for an application form and complete list of qualifying activities.

TREE CITY USA®

Conferences, Workshops and More

There are many opportunities for arborists to improve their knowledge and skills, or for others to begin preparing for work with trees. A good starting place is to visit **arborday.org**. There you will find a current listing of conferences and workshops scheduled at Lied Lodge & Conference Center at Arbor Day Farm and at other locations throughout the nation. Arrangements can even be made to hold workshops or seminars at your location with local sponsorship. For more information, phone 888-448-7337.

For information about three organizations of special interest to professional arborists, visit **arborday.org/bulletins** and click on Bulletin No. 6.



James R. Fazio

Arborists work not only in trees but in the ground beneath trees. Here a campus arborist at the University of Idaho volunteers his time to work with tree board members in his community. The group is drilling holes with a soil auger in an attempt to save street trees suffering from heavily compacted soil.

TREE CITY USA

The Tree City USA program is sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. To achieve the national recognition of being named as a Tree City USA, a town or city must meet four standards:

Standard 1: A Tree Board or Department
Standard 2: A Tree Care Ordinance
Standard 3: An Annual Community Forestry Program
Standard 4: An Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation

Each winning community receives a Tree City USA flag, plaque, and community entrance signs. Towns and cities of every size can qualify. Tree City USA application forms are available from your state forester or the Arbor Day Foundation.

Preparation for a Career

The job market in tree work is wide open for anyone in good physical condition and who loves the outdoors. There are two ways to enter the field. One is by beginning as a ground crew member or tree climber with an established company. Many offer excellent training and opportunities for advancement. The other way is to obtain a college education in arboriculture, urban horticulture, or urban forestry. To see a list of colleges and universities that offer degree programs in these fields, visit the Web site of the International Society of Arboriculture at: isa-arbor.com and click on Careers in Arboriculture.

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