

# How Do You Find a Professional Certified Arborist?

*By Elaine Pugh, Fairfax Master Gardener*

We have many people each year who come to the Master Gardener plant clinics and ask us if we can come to their homes and help them with their yards. We have customers who have problems that are much larger than they could handle as a homeowner, such as the Emerald Ash Borer that is infesting their trees. For these, they may need to hire a certified arborist. Then the question comes up — how do I find one?

Chances are pretty good that the flyers people find behind their doors are not from certified arborists. We see badly butchered trees every year that are cut back by workers who should have never have been given a chainsaw, but are hired by well-meaning homeowners.

What is a certified arborist? According to the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) “Certified Arborists are individuals who have achieved a level of knowledge in the art and science of tree care through experience and by passing a comprehensive examination developed by some of the nation’s leading experts on tree care. Certified Arborists must also continue their education to maintain their certification and adhere to a Code of Ethics. Therefore, they are more likely to be up-to-date on the latest techniques in arboriculture.” In short, they are ISA certified, professional tree experts.

So, how do you find one? According to Adria Bordas, our extension agent, we typically have them go to [www.goodtreecare.com](http://www.goodtreecare.com).

Read both sides of the contract carefully and call or email the arborist with any questions. The important thing is to find a certified arborist that you can work well with. According to the ISA, “You should examine the credentials and the written specifications of the firms that submitted bids and determine the best combination of price, work to be done, skill and professionalism to protect your substantial investment.” Also, keep in mind that good arborists will perform only industry-accepted practices. For example, practices such as topping a tree, removing an excessive amount of live wood, using climbing spikes on trees that are not being removed and removing or disfiguring living trees without just cause are improper practices and violate industry standards.

I went through this process myself. I interviewed three certified arborists and hired the one I was the most comfortable working with. We went over everything in my yard. I told him what I do every year, where I was having problems and where I felt I needed help. He was happy to see that I know my yard. We broke down what I was going to continue to do to save money and what he was going to do — mainly properly pruning the large trees I can’t climb, spraying trees that I can no longer reach, treating a tree that now needs stronger medicine than I can buy as a homeowner and removing some weed trees along the fence line that could otherwise fall into my neighbor’s yard. It is working well, and as the arborist reminded me, we both have the same goals in mind.

## Reference

*Hiring an Arborist to Care for Your Landscape Trees*, publication ANR-131NP, Virginia Cooperative Extension Office