

Managing Your Trees and Shrubs: A Decision Guide

There is lots of information out there on the care and maintenance of your trees and shrubs. But how do you know what is the best course of action to take? You can hire a tree care professional or a certified arborist. They should provide you with sound options and alternatives to help you decide what to do. Or perhaps you can do-it-yourself? Ultimately though, you as the homeowner or property caretaker may have to choose what is best. Here are some steps to help guide the decision.

The first step in this process is to identify what you have. Conduct an inventory of your trees and shrubs. How many and where are they located? Whether you have a tenth of an acre or 100 acres you can't manage what you don't know you have. Species, size (both height and diameter), condition (healthy, dying, dead), and location (especially in proximity to other trees or objects such as outbuildings and overhead utility lines), are essential.

If your trees and shrubs are in need of care such as pruning, trimming, treatment for insects or disease, or nutrient deficiency, you have to decide if they are worth saving. At this point a professional arborist or plant care specialist may be contacted to help you determine the extent of care necessary and how long the tree will need treatment. Is the tree valuable to the landscape or owner? Is it healthy or are there signs of decay, dead wood, or insect damage? Is the tree located in the right site? Will it cost more to maintain the tree or is it best to cut it down and start over? Weigh your options and discuss them with your arborist. Remember, it will cost more to remove a standing dead tree than it will to remove a tree before it completely dies. The ideal time to prune or trim trees is during the dormant season.

Arborists and plant care specialists are trained to look for signs indicating a tree is having health issues. Even their opinions can vary at times. Get at least two estimates for work to be done. Hire a certified professional. Ask for references and liability insurance. Look at other trees and shrubs in your neighborhood. For example, if there are signs that there is an insect infestation team up with your neighbors and seek discounts for managing all your trees at once. Always contact your City Arborist about local ordinances before performing any tree work.

As a general rule of thumb, if there is an option to treat a tree with an insecticide on any tree greater than 20 inches in diameter, a professional arborist should do the job. If it is less, the homeowner may consider doing the treatment if they have the necessary tools and equipment OR hire a professional.



Insect galleries under the bark can be difficult to detect

Why hire a professional? If it is a tree care company they will have the necessary equipment for proper trimming or tree removal. If it is a plant care specialist or certified arborist they will be

able to use equipment that is used to inject pesticides to treat insects. If you choose to remove the tree they can also suggest a suitable replacement for the specific planting location. Remember, choose a diverse species of trees.

Why is DIY tree care dangerous? Though it may seem simple, tree work is actually extremely complicated, technical and dangerous. Homeowners have been injured and even killed by falling limbs, faulty equipment, or general carelessness while attempting “do-it-yourself” tree work.



Proper safety equipment is essential for tree trimming or removal

Common accident factors include:

- **Use of extension ladders.** If you need to use a ladder for your tree care work, think twice. If your ladder does not extend at least 3 feet past the branch, cutting off the end of a branch will cause the branch to rise up beyond the ladder. Many ladder related fatalities occur this way. Do not make the mistake of setting the ladder on something unsteady to get the reach you need.
- **Improper tools.** Faulty tree care equipment, such as a dull chain saw, can cause terrible accidents. It is very easy to lose control or misuse the tools, which often results in a trip to the hospital.
- **Lack of knowledge about tree physics and biology.** Aimlessly hacking away at the tree with your axe or chain saw is dangerous! For example, homeowners are often tempted to cut corners by removing limbs in massive, unwieldy sections. The weight makes the limb section difficult to control, and this may damage the tree – or you.

If you are at all uncertain about what could happen by attempting your own tree work, contact a qualified tree care professional. Safety is the cornerstone of the tree care profession, and professional arborists have the experience and training necessary to navigate hazards.

In particular, arborists are trained to:

- Identify trees or branches with decay, cracks or unbalanced weight
- Avoid nearby overhead electrical wires and other conductors
- Prevent falls from trees they are working on
- Remove portions of or entire trees without causing bodily harm or property damage



Less than half of this ash tree has viable leaves

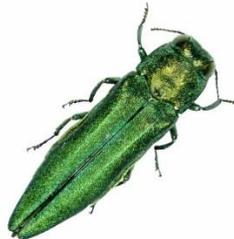
Which trees can be saved? Even before contacting a professional you can make a fair judgement as to whether or not a tree can be saved.

Trees **CAN** be saved if they are:

- Healthy and vigorously growing, with more than half their leaves intact
- Enhancing the landscape
- Valuable to the owner
- Showing only a few outward signs of insect invasion or disease

Trees should **NOT** be saved if they are:

- Unhealthy, with more than half of their leaves missing.
- Planted in poor sites or are not important to the landscape
- Showing outward signs of stress, insect damage, or disease such as woodpecker damage, bark splits, water sprouts at the base, fungus on the tree or at the base of the trunk.



Invasive insects such as the Emerald Ash Borer can be difficult to control

Street and boulevard trees are not growing in their natural environment so they are already under stress when we put them there. Stress such as drought, overwatering, insects, soil compaction, competition from other plants, diseases, herbicide application and trunk damage from mowers and string trimmers can cause the health of a tree to decline. If the cause can be determined and corrected early enough, quite often the resiliency of trees will keep them alive. The benefits of trees are endless, and the bigger the tree the greater the benefits. Let's do what we can to provide proper care and maintenance of our trees and shrubs.

For further information or if there are any questions you may contact the City of Powell Arborist at (307) 754-6971.

