

## FINDING THE RIGHT TREE SPECIALIST - 2011

by

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Just when you are least likely to be thinking about fire danger, it's time for our annual Master Gardener class on Firewise Landscaping. That's because winter can be the best time for firewise improvements and maintenance on your property. This year, the class is Saturday, January 29; from 9:00-11:00 in EDC Bldg. C, located on Fair Lane Court in Placerville. Can't make the class? You can find our 2010 column, which covered the basics that we'll be discussing, at <http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/files/81230.pdf>.

At the end of our class, we often get many questions about trees. As you might expect, here in the foothills, people are pretty attached to their trees. There is a lot people can do themselves to make their property fire wise. But when it comes to pruning or removing trees that are large and/or adjacent to a structure, most people need to enlist the skills of a tree specialist. This can be the most challenging and most expensive part of a firewise renovation, so we hope this article will help demystify the process of selecting a tree specialist.

Master Gardeners are often asked for the name for a good arborist. Because University of California Cooperative Extension regulations prohibit Master Gardeners from recommending specific products or services, we thought it would be helpful to provide some general guidelines so you can find the right person/business for your job.

Each property is different, and these differences are a big factor in the kind of help you will need. Often, branches overhanging roofs and chimneys can be pruned without removing the whole tree. This is particularly true for parcels with mature oaks, for which proper pruning is crucial. Be aware that there is an oak ordinance in El Dorado County that regulates the removal of large oaks, but these rules generally do not apply within the 100' defensive space clearance area mandated by state law. Regulations for removal of conifers from your property may require a permit and/or services of a Registered Professional Forester (RPF). Check with CAL FIRE at 530-644-1631 for details on these requirements.

Two national oversight groups that certify individuals and businesses dealing with landscape trees are the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA - [www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com)) and the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA - [www.treecareindustry.org](http://www.treecareindustry.org)). Both groups have features on their websites to help you find local specialists who are certified. The following definitions come from the websites of these two groups:

**Arborists** – According to the ISA, a Certified Arborist must have “three or more years of full-time, eligible, practical work experience in arboriculture and/or a degree in the field of arboriculture, horticulture, landscape architecture, or forestry from a regionally accredited educational institute,” and have passed an ISA exam.

**Tree care companies** - TCIA-accredited companies are inspected and qualified based on:

- Adherence to the TCIA Code of Ethics and best business practices
- Employing formally trained, skilled personnel

- Meeting industry standards for quality performance and safety
- Providing industry-standard written estimates
- Customer satisfaction, including following a dispute resolution process
- Carrying sufficient insurance coverage
- Employing Certified Arborists

Some arborists may assess the property and perform the physical acts of cutting needed branches and trees, others provide advice and oversee workers doing the cutting, and some only make recommendations and leave it to the homeowner to select a tree service. Not all tree services employ an arborist, but experts recommend that you hire a tree service that does.

The Better Business Bureau, in their pamphlet entitled *How to Choose a Tree Care Company* ([http://www.treecareindustry.org/PDFs/BBBtipsBrochure8\\_05.pdf](http://www.treecareindustry.org/PDFs/BBBtipsBrochure8_05.pdf)), offers good advice on selecting the right business:

- Homeowners should verify the business carries liability and worker's comp insurance, as well as required licenses.
- Get a written estimate from more than one company.
- Require that the estimate (and contract) provide specifics about what work will be done and what cleanup work will be completed.
- Request (and check out) references. It can also be good to ask friends and neighbors for suggestions.
- Verify that the arborist who gives you the bid will actually be overseeing the job.

Here are some additional points to consider for firewise projects:

- Determine how experienced the business is with firewise tree work.
- Get a feeling for the person's knowledge by how they discuss your specific situation.
- Ask if any permits are necessary.

It's important to realize that the money you spend can allow you to maximize both the beauty of your trees and the safety of your property. Having large trees removed or pruned can seem like a daunting proposition. But honestly, many people report that once the work is completed, their property "looks like a park" and they really do have more peace of mind. Sometimes the hardest step is the first one. Hopefully, this article can help you take that first step with more confidence.