



# The Homeowner's Role in Maintaining the Urban Forest

**U**rban trees provide health, environmental, economical, and aesthetic values to communities, businesses, and homes.

Trees that are not properly maintained or that are stressed can quickly become major liabilities to people and property from weather phenomena.

Immediate responses may be either to prune or remove your trees. These “do-it-yourself” efforts sometimes result in personal injuries, fatalities, or property damage that homeowners are attempting to avoid. You can cause greater harm to the urban forest by removing healthy trees that do not need to be cut.

## URBAN TREES MAKE HOMES MORE VALUABLE!

- Urban trees can increase home values by 15 percent.
- Can lower indoor air temperatures in summer. This translates into as much as a 30 percent savings on air conditioning bills.
- The same trees planted on the west side, along with a northern shrub barrier, can create an insulation zone to prevent heat loss from winter winds and save nearly 23 percent in fuel use.

## *It's as Easy as ...*

- 1 Conducting Self-Surveys.** These help you learn about your urban environment and prepare you to meet with a certified arborist. Conduct a survey annually, note changes to tree structures each time, and call a certified arborist, if needed. Turn to the back of this sheet to get started today!
- 2 Giving Routine Tree Care.** Trees need watering, fertilizing, and mulching. Certified arborists can help you determine which trees will need certain care at various times of the year. Add this information to your surveys for future reference!
- 3 Hiring Certified Arborists.** They know how to remedy hazardous tree situations (pruning and/or removing trees) and should be consulted every other year to update tree assessments and provide major tree care, if needed. Certified arborists are trained to plant, care, and maintain trees. They have at least three years experience and have passed a comprehensive exam by an industry association. Certification relates to their knowledge of trees and tree physiology and requires them to remain updated in the latest arboriculture techniques. It does not govern individual performance, though. Check out “Tips for Selecting Certified Arborists” to the right!

It's your urban forest—learn it, grow it, maintain it, enjoy it! For more information and assistance, call the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) at 1-800-GA-TREES during daytime business hours. E-mails can be sent to [urbantreesafety@gfc.state.ga.us](mailto:urbantreesafety@gfc.state.ga.us). Also, visit GFC's website at [gatrees.org](http://gatrees.org).

## *Tips for Selecting Certified Arborists*

Locate certified arborists at [gatrees.org](http://gatrees.org), through the phone directory, and recommendations made by family members, neighbors, friends, and work associates. Then, gauge selections based on the following checklist.

### **Certification**

Look for professional association memberships with organizations like the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA), the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), and the National Arborist Association (NAA). While membership in any of these organizations is good, only ISA has a certification program, so look for the ISA certified arborist logo.

### **Proof of Insurance**

Ask for proof of workers' compensation and personal and property damage insurance. Verify that each policy is current by calling insurance carriers. This helps protect homeowners from being responsible for injuries or property damages that may result from work.

### **Permits**

Determine if certified arborists know about local, state, and/or federal laws that require them to get permits before work is performed.

### **Call References**

Call references and visit their sites to see finished work.

### **Quotes**

Get written estimates, even if it costs to have an estimate completed. Ensure that estimates include credentials, written scope of work to be performed, and all costs. Compare quotes on the basis of services to be performed and costs for each service. If a certified arborist only performs consultations, ask for recommendations for certified arborists who actually perform tree maintenance or removal and compare quotes with others.

### **Contracts**

Demand that work only start once a contract is signed by both parties. Read contracts carefully before signing. Verify that contracts detail when work will be started and completed, which party is responsible for cleanup, the total price, and the certified arborist's hourly rate for additional work approved by the customer.

# Homeowner Tree Survey

With a pad and pen, start at the front of your property and move to the sides and back, noting elements of each tree based on:

- Species (e.g. white oak, red maple) \_\_\_\_\_
- Height (seedling to 20 feet tall, 21 feet tall to 40 feet tall, and more than 40 feet tall) \_\_\_\_\_
- Location on Property (include distance from house foundation, other impervious surfaces like driveway, sidewalks, roadway, and utility lines) \_\_\_\_\_
- Certified Arborist's Annual Routine Tree Care Recommendations \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Season(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Part of Tree	Yes	No	Unknown
<i>Tree Canopy</i>			
■ Clusters of living branches growing from limbs that have been improperly pruned (such branches are often weakly attached and subject to breakage)			
<i>Leaves</i>			
■ Unusually small or discolored			
■ Premature loss of leaves, especially at branch tips			
<i>Bark (Trunk and Branches)</i>			
■ Presence of fungi on branches, trunk, or exposed roots			
■ Noticeable wounds from lawnmowers and vehicles, fire scorching, and/or embedded objects (e.g. hammock eye hooks and flower pot hangers)			
■ Appearance of abnormal wet areas or sap seepage ( <i>Note: The presence of a sour odor probably indicates slime flux – a non-serious condition</i> )			
<i>Major Branches</i>			
■ Codominant stems (two or more major stems growing from the same point on trunk)			
■ Indications of wood splitting below adjoining stems			
■ Covered with fungi			
■ Noticeable large dead branches (either attached to trunk or detached but caught within other branches)			
<i>Trunk</i>			
■ Leans noticeably			
■ Cavities or hollows			
■ Presence of decayed wood			
■ Cracks or splitting			
<i>Roots</i>			
■ Growth of mushroom-type fungi along root zone			
■ Appearance of sawdust along trunk base and root zone			
■ Possible damage to roots from known reasons like construction, lowered or raised soil levels, trenches dug for utilities, and/or new encroaching landscape infrastructure (e.g. sidewalks/paths, turf, raised flower beds, shrubs, ground covers around root base, etc.)			
■ Exposed roots on the soil's surface 2 feet or more from the trunk or on sloped or banked areas			
■ Signs of puddle formation, runoff, or soil erosion			
■ Appearance of soft soil conditions			
■ Soil mounding or settling at base of tree			
<i>Neighboring Trees</i>			
■ Removal of trees in neighboring area that may have caused environmental changes (e.g. tall trees now at edge of woods or tall trees suddenly standing alone)			
■ Disturbance or damage to existing tree roots from prior removal of a neighboring tree			

The Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) recommends that a certified arborist be hired to evaluate any trees of concern, or trees for which a homeowner has answered "yes" to any of the indicators above.