ARBORICULTURAL CONSULTING SERVICES
Tree expertise for designers, homeowners and everyone else

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The Role of the Consulting Arborist

When Should a Designer Use a Consulting Arborist?

Consider a more or less typical project, a design for a site with existing trees and at least some existing hardscape. Often such a project will go forward with little or no involvement by an arborist, and a consultant only gets called in after project completion, when trees start to develop problems. A consulting arborist can help avoid long term problems by providing services in the following areas:

- *Site Evaluation*
- Tree Inventory and mapping, including SULE (Safe Useful Life Expectancy)
- Soil and Grade issues
- Hazardous tree evaluation

- *Design and Approval Process*
- Required arborist reports
- Tree protection guidelines
- Irrigation guidelines
- Minimizing root/hardscape conflict
- Species and cultivar selection
- Design review, including specification review (planting details, nursery stock, etc.)

- *Construction Phase*
- Site inspections (for tree protection compliance, correct planting and staking, soil compaction management, nursery stock inspection, etc.)

- *Maintenance Phase*
- Landscape maintenance guidelines (pruning guidelines, irrigation and fertilization specs, pest and disease monitoring and management)
- Irrigation monitoring (Are the trees getting too much or too little water? Is the system working as designed?)
- Post-construction problems; trees fail to thrive or develop problems

This seems like a lot of involvement and expense, and it is. But you will have a superior product that will be more successful in the long term.

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What is the Range of Services Offered?

Consulting arborists offer a wide range of services, and often are experts in one or more areas. The American Society of Consulting Arborists lists the following areas of expertise:

- Plant Health Care
- Insect and Disease ID and Management
- Forensic Investigation (for example, determining whether the cause of a tree failure was due to recent construction disturbance, or whether decay and structural instability predated it)
- Tree, Landscape and Nursery Appraisals
- Contract Preparation and Supervision
- Municipal Ordinance Development
- Tree Management for Arboreta, Golf Courses and Nurseries
- Diagnosis of Tree and Landscape Problems
- Expert Witness and Litigation
- Hazardous Tree Assessment and Surveys
- Tree Protection for Consultation Projects
- Tree and Plant Inventory
- Tree Planting Programs
- Training and Education

Most consulting arborists are members of the *American Society of Consulting Arborists*. ASCA welcomes as members all experienced professional arborists who meet the eligibility requirements. These requirements include:

- Five or more years of industry experience, and
- Four-year degree in arboriculture or a related field, or 240 or more approved continuing education units (CEU's) earned for degrees, course work and industry conference attendance.

Membership eligibility is determined through an independent, objective review of these qualifications. All members of ASCA must earn 30 CEU's (Continuing Education Units) every two years to retain membership status.

How Does an Arborist's Training and Experience Differ from a Landscape Architect's?

A landscape in the built environment can be thought of as having three phases; design, installation, and maintenance. Landscape architects are experts in designing spaces, and many have experience in installation as well. However, most have little or no experience *maintaining* landscapes. Most consulting

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arborists have extensive experience maintaining trees; they also have a very good understanding of how design and installation affect the long term health, safety and prospects of trees.

These differing backgrounds can be seen in how trees are perceived. Arborists tend to look at a tree from the ground up, and from the inside out. We look at the root crown, then the trunk, then branch structure. We look at soil conditions, taper, branch distribution, angles of attachment, weight distribution, decay, cracks, conks, etc. In addition we look for general indications of health, such as foliage density and color. Also, arborists tend to think in four dimensions – we're always looking ahead to anticipate the future form of the tree, problems the tree may pose or face as it grows, amenability to future pruning, encroachment, etc.

Compare this to designers, who *tend* to see silhouette and mass first, then form (this is a generalization, but I think you'll find it holds true a large percentage of the time), then mechanical problems and health. Because they do not usually have extensive experience with maintaining trees, designers are less likely to identify existing or developing problems. Also, there is some tendency to see future trees as just a larger version of the existing tree.

Because of the complexity of the profession, it can be very difficult for landscape architects to keep up with the latest developments in arboriculture. Since arborists focus on trees, they can be helpful in providing up-to-date information. Here are just three examples:

- *Raywood ash.* This tree is generally rated highly, and is still widely planted. However, in recent years it has been subject to a very widespread dieback disease, recently identified as a kind of *Botriosphaeria*.
- *Sudden Oak Death*. New discoveries are being made all the time. For example, Victoria box (Pittosporum undulatum) has been published as a host, but this is not widely known.
- *Biomechanics*. A great deal of work has been done in the last twenty years regarding failure profiles of trees, the extent of decay a tree can tolerate before failing, and the relationship of tree architecture to failure patterns. This information is virtually unknown outside of arboricultural circles.