

TREE CARE by Louise T. Gantress

Whether you've just moved to Armonk from a city where the only trees you saw were in a park, or you're a long time resident familiar with trees on your property, there is always something to learn about them. Two certified arborists, Thomas Marino, who holds a Masters of Forest Science from Yale, and Dan Moore, who has over twenty years experience in the field, offer advice.

Both men advise not to call just anyone, but to do your research before you call someone. A tree cutter or lawn man may be cheaper in the short run, but may cause more damage for the long run. Aside from their environmental impact, trees add value to your property so their care is important. The International Society of Arbor Culture (www.isa.com) is the best place to start for a list of local certified arborists. Why a certified arborist? Because a trained specialist can provide the best care in tree health: soil, sun, tree age and type, insect or trauma damage and other aspects of tree care. The next step is to check references and select an arborist. A free consultation is typical, but a long-term relationship is important. Get a feel for the person.

A new resident may not know what questions to ask. Both Tom and Dan advised a property assessment prior to taking any, especially drastic, action. In a perfect world one should live in the house for a year, noting sun patterns and living with the trees. Actions to take immediately involve cabling weak limbs, pruning dead branches, treating or cutting dying or dead trees. Dan suggested grooming young trees early to prevent later problems, stating "At least fifty percent of the damage from snow this past winter could have been prevented had the trees been properly pruned." An arborist can address treatment need on an on-going basis.

Additionally, an arborist can provide a plan, staged by type of action: immediate, interim and long term. Pruning, cutting, fertilizing and tick mitigation are immediate actions. Organic is loosely defined as any compound that contains carbon, so any commercial product can therefore be called "organic." Tom recommends a bio mix that poses no risk to well water and will not stimulate unnatural growth that can weaken trees. It is important to maintain a natural shoot to root ratio, and nourish roots. Dan recognized a homeowner's goals for trees, such as screening or shade, and said regular care can achieve these goals.

Often people decide to renovate older houses, but construction can cause trauma to trees. An arborist can assist the owner in planning for safety. A general rule of thumb is that tree roots extend three times the "drip line" from branches. A planning consultation with an arborist will also consider any allergies caused by tree spores (willows and honey locust have high pollen), or

an improper mix of trees that are not friendly to each other, such as crab apple and juniper, or apple and cedar. Some species, such as Russian olive, are invasive. A garden store may simply sell product without regard for the competitive impact that can overwhelm a designed landscape. Again, the ISA site can be a reliable reference source. One can also go to www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/index.shtml for specific information.

Once a plan is in place, there needs to be follow-up at least twice a year. In summer one can see the leaf structure and health of trees; in winter, their structure to assess integrity. Think in terms of a relationship with your trees, and the arborist as their “doctor.” Knowledge and awareness will lead to questions, and goals. The arborist will assist in setting priorities and staging actions, which consider safety as well as maintenance and appearance. Knowledge and awareness lead to questions that result in appropriate goals.

Trees are alive: a young tree staked with a ring around it for stability will soon outgrow that brace and its future growth and health will be hindered by the device. Dan recommended moving the brace up or down the plane of the tree. Both Tom and Dan agree that the brace and stake should be removed within one to two years so as not to cause permanent injury to the young tree. Staking a tree longer can choke it, resulting in a serious weakness that may even kill the tree.

An owner should develop a relationship with an arborist. Trees require health care throughout their long lives.