

Factors Affecting the Pricing of Tree Removal and Tree Trimming:

By Evan Keller, Owner of Tree Work Now, Orlando's Industry Standard-Raising Tree Service

Customers often ask my estimators and I if we can give them a price over the telephone. This is nearly impossible, given the variety of factors that influence tree trimming or tree removal. Danger level and time required are the two largest categories that affect the price of tree service.

Why Danger Increases Costs

Danger accelerates costs for obvious reasons. Expert tree workers are paid more than novices; skill and courage should be rewarded, especially when risking life and limb! Danger slows down the operation as well, at least for safety-conscious tree services such as ours. Heightened danger translates into a higher probability of a Workers' Compensation claim, which drives up costs for companies and impairs valuable workers. Worse yet, hundreds of Central Florida tree "companies" bid low on dangerous jobs without even having the Workers' Compensation coverage mandated by Florida law! This leaves their employees without medical coverage and their customers exposed to litigation. It also deprives law-abiding companies from work and tarnishes their reputations with customers who may perceive them as overpriced.

Which Tree Jobs are More Dangerous?

The danger level is heightened any time we are working near power lines, for obvious reasons! The other most dangerous element involved in our industry is deadwood. When a tree is dead, it is not only far less stable, but also very unpredictable. In many cases, the only way to remove a dead tree safely is by crane, which we do quite often in our work in the Orlando and Daytona Beach areas. I need not emphasize the extra cost involved in using such a large and expensive piece of machinery! Please call us as soon as you see a tree dying; it will save you money and be much safer for our tree crews to remove. Recently dying trees can be removed by traditional climbing and rigging methods. Even so, as heavy logs swing and are lowered to the ground, additional stress is added to the trunk which is already beginning to rot. Even trees which are still quite alive often develop hollow trunks as they approach the limits of their lifespan. Hollow trees are also much more dangerous to trim or remove, given their heightened unpredictability (as their level of rot is hard to determine until after the cuts are made). Inexperienced workers should never be hired to trim or remove hollow trees! It is hard enough for highly experienced tree crews such as ours to discern the precise felling trajectory of a hollow tree. Other factors that increase danger include: excessive heights to which our workers must go, emergency work at night or in inclement weather, work near busy roads, work on very large or heavy trees (hardwood trees are very heavy, with live oak timber weighing upwards of 75 pounds per cubic foot).

The Time Factor

The time required to complete your tree job is second only to danger in computing the price of your tree trimming and/or tree removal.

Which Tree Jobs Take Longer?

POOR ACCESS: Poor access for equipment can cause a job to take up to three times as long! If brush has to be dug by hand for considerable distances, it tires out our workers quite rapidly, requiring larger crews and larger payrolls. Whereas if we can bring our wood chippers right up to the trees and load the logs on trucks with our tractors, much time is saved for us and your property is back to normal sooner. Without equipment access for log removal, it takes excessive time to slice logs into pieces small enough for humans to carry! This also adds extra wear and tear on our chainsaws. Access is limited by fences, narrow spaces between houses, septic tanks, delicate landscaping, low or otherwise soft ground, and other quirks of a given property.

PROXIMITY TO STRUCTURES: The threat to customers' homes is the most common reason we are asked to trim or remove trees. For that very reason, it takes extra time and care to remove those branches or trees safely. When receiving estimates for your tree work, I suggest that you ask each estimator about how long it will take for their crew to complete the job. If both their time estimate and their cost estimate are low, you may want to take pause and consider whether they'd be taking undue risks with your house! This is a case when one should not automatically balk at a higher price. In addition to safeguarding structures, tree work takes longer around fences, sidewalks, and sprinkler systems.

Operational Costs Influence Pricing

In addition to danger and time required, costs that may not be apparent to the customer affect the price they get from tree service estimators. For example, a customer may complain if they are charged three times as much for a 30 inch diameter tree than the 20 inch tree they had removed the previous year. What the customer may not realize is that the largest wood chipper for residential use can only make mulch out of trees that are 20 inches across or smaller. So, although hidden to the customer, the tree company is paying these additional costs when removing a tree that cannot be chipped on site: time and fuel to go to the dump, wear and tear on the transporting equipment, additional payroll, and dump fees. In addition, this year's tree may be subject to the higher costs of the danger and time factors enumerated above! Or if it was removed by a company which did not have the proper insurances, the customer was lucky nothing went wrong (in a line of work with multitudinous avenues of mishap)! Or perhaps last year's tree could be felled with one cut, whereas the current tree is tangled in others and must be climbed and lowered in several sections. Another operational cost is the amount and type of equipment necessary for the given job. Some jobs require lifts or tractors, dump trailers or stump grinders. Each piece is costly to purchase, insure, maintain, transport, fuel, and operate.

As you can see, there are a variety of factors that influence the prices you are given. Being highly contextualized to the exact situation of each particular tree, it is hard to objectively compare to what you paid for tree work in the past. After reading this article, you can understand why we don't give prices over the phone! Feel free to ask us to explain why each tree costs what it does

to trim or remove. Ironically, sometimes it's even cheaper to remove a tree than to trim it! And always, the cost of an identical tree can vary widely depending on its surroundings. Above all, I encourage you to hire a tree service which seems committed to taking the necessary time and care to safeguard your property, and which carries Workers' Compensation. Having a highly-experienced crew and well-maintained equipment also demonstrate a prior commitment to quality workmanship. Remember, the highest priced tree job begins with a low bid and ends with unrepaired damage to your property!