

Plant Health Care

Explains what plant health care means, what its implementation involves, and how trees and shrubs benefit from it.



Symptoms, such as discolored leaves, dead branches, or early leaf drop, can prompt a call to a local arborist.

Sometimes the cause of concern is a minor problem that is easily explained and corrected. Other times, the problem is more complex, with several underlying causes and a remedy that requires treatments extending over several years. Unfortunately, if the problem has gone undetected for so long that the tree cannot be helped, removal may be the only option.

The Solution: Plant Health Care

To better address situations such as these, arborists created Plant Health Care (PHC) programs. The objective of PHC is to maintain or improve the landscape's appearance, vitality, and — in the case of trees — safety, using the most cost-effective and environmentally sensitive practices and treatments available. Plant Health Care involves routine monitoring, preventive treatment, and a strong working relationship between the arborist and the property owner.

Why Plant Health Care, Not Tree Health Care?

While trees are dominant ornamental features in your home landscape, they share this area with turfgrasses, shrubs, and other plants. All these plants are bedded in a common resource: the soil. The roots of trees, shrubs, turfgrass, and bedding plants intermingle and compete for water and nutrients. The roots of a single mature tree may extend well into your lawn or flower beds. Every treatment applied to the lawn (fertilizer and herbicide, for example) can impact the appearance and vitality of a tree. Conversely, treatments applied to a tree, such as pruning and fertilizing, can influence the appearance and vitality of the underlying turfgrass. The care of each plant in a landscape can affect the health of every plant in that landscape.

Why Contact an Arborist for Plant Health Care?

Arborists have the experience and training to detect many potential tree and shrub problems before they become life-threatening or hazardous. Arborists can also make tree and shrub recommendations, such as species selection and placement, to prevent problems from occurring in the first place. In addition, arborists can consult with other landscape and lawn care services you may use to ensure that the treatments are coordinated and will not be harmful to your trees and shrubs.

Remember, the potential size and longevity of trees and shrubs warrants special attention in your landscape. Bedding plants can be replaced in a few short weeks and a lawn in a single growing season, but it can take a lifetime or more to replace a mature tree.

What Does a Tree and Shrub PHC Program Cover?

Every client has different landscape objectives, so there is no standard PHC program. However, PHC programs do have several common features. First, PHC involves monitoring tree and shrub health. This step allows problems to be detected and managed before they become serious. The monitoring may be as simple as annual visits to check on a few special trees in your landscape, or it may involve more frequent quarterly or monthly inspections of all your trees and shrubs. The monitoring frequency and complexity of your PHC program depend on the size and diversity of your landscape, as well as your particular landscape goals.



Second, if a problem or potential problem is detected during a monitoring visit, your arborist will work with you to develop a solution. This could be as simple as reducing lawn irrigation frequency so soil conditions aren't too moist for tree roots. Other solutions include more detailed suggestions, such as pruning or spot applications of pesticides.

Your arborist will provide you with information about your trees and shrubs that will let you make appropriate management decisions for your budget and goals. Can you tolerate a disease or pest that only affects a plant cosmetically? Would replacing a shrub with a more disease-resistant cultivar be preferable to treatment? Plant Health Care is a program tailored to the needs of the client and his or her trees and shrubs.



What Will a PHC Program Cost?

Because each program is individually designed to fit the needs of a particular landscape, no standard price can be given without a site visit and assessment. You may have an interest in developing a plan for a few key trees in your landscape, or you may wish to have the entire landscape placed on a program. PHC programs can also be structured in different ways. For example, some programs charge a fee for monitoring and bill each treatment separately. Other programs have an annual fee that covers all monitoring visits for the season as well as many potential treatments. These more comprehensive programs provide peace of mind in knowing that treatments for most potential problems are already covered by the program without additional charges. Individualized programs and flexibility are at the heart of PHC. You will find that your arborist can design a Plant Health Care program that fits your goals and budget.

How Do I Choose an Arborist?

Check the phone directory for arborists who are members of professional organizations, such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), or the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA), and also look for ISA Certified Arborists. These credentials demonstrate a commitment to education and to staying abreast of the latest information and techniques. Ask for proof of insurance and references, and don't hesitate to check them. Remember, tree care is a substantial, long-lasting investment in your valuable assets; take the time to select a knowledgeable professional to care for your landscape.

This brochure is one in a series published by the International Society of Arboriculture as part of its Consumer Information Program. You may have additional interest in the following titles currently in the series:

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