HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

TREE TRIMMING AND REMOVAL

Almost every year, storms occur that are strong enough to bring down trees and branches. It's important to look carefully at the trees around your property – both old and dying trees and younger, healthy specimens – to determine how they might impact your house or garage. This inspection is often easiest in the spring, when you can readily identify dead branches because they don't have leaf buds.

INSPECT YOUR TREES

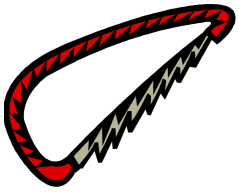
With healthy trees, check whether any limbs have grown long enough to reach the roof or siding. It's amazing how much damage they can do! Wind-blown branches that repeatedly rub against a surface can cut through shingles and other roofing materials; damage paint; destroy wood, vinyl or aluminum siding; and even scar masonry, stucco and concrete. Identify any branches that should be trimmed back from the house or garage. Then, look for dead and dying trees and limbs, particularly those overhanging the house or garage, which could cause damage if felled by high winds.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOL

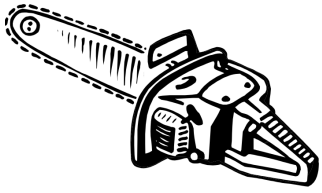
Once you have made your inspection, decide whether you can do the work yourself.



Pruning saw



Bow saw



Chain saw

BRANCH SIZE	TOOL
Smaller branches (up to 1-1/4 inches in diameter)	**Loppers** (a tool that resembles hedge shears, but with smaller "jaws" and longer handles).
High branches	A **pole saw** with a 12-foot extension handle will let you reach high branches and trim small ones from the ground.
Slightly thicker branches	Try a **bow saw** or **pruning saw**.

BRANCH SIZE	TOOL
Heavier branches	You will probably need a **chain saw**. Make sure that the saw you'll be using will be powerful enough for the job, so you don't burn out the motor. For example, the smaller electric chain saws that homeowners often purchase are designed to cut branches less than 8 inches thick (about the size of a roll of paper towels or a paint can), and smaller gas chain saws won't cut branches more than about 14 inches in diameter. You can usually find models that will cut larger limbs at commercial tool rentals.

CHAIN SAW SAFETY

> **PLAN AHEAD**
>
> Because chain saws are so powerful, it's important to use them safely – especially if you'll be high off the ground. Plan ahead. Think about where you'll be standing and how far you'll have to reach. (Hanging onto a ladder with one hand while you reach out with the other to saw off a limb is asking for trouble.)

Make sure you'll be able to handle the weight of the saw, *before* you climb a ladder or go out onto a roof. Will you need both hands to control it? If so, how will you keep your grip on the ladder? Ensure that you'll be stable while making the cut. You may feel more secure standing on a porch roof than on a ladder. If a ladder is the only option, you can use a rope to tie both you and the ladder to the tree, but make sure the ladder is positioned so you'll be able to keep your hips centered between the two rails as you use the saw. Avoid loose clothing that can become entangled in the chain, and wear eye protection to guard against flying debris.

BEFORE YOU START, ANALYZE THE CUT

- Is there any danger that the chain saw will become jammed in the notch of the tree and start to "kick back" into your face?
- Are there any nails or wire on the tree that can damage the saw?
- When you cut through the limb, where will it fall? (It's a good idea to use ropes to control the descent of any large limbs, so they don't crash into your neighbor's car or take out your electric lines.)

CUTTING LIMBS ON THE GROUND

Once the limb is on the ground, you may wish to cut it into smaller lengths. Prop the branch up on something, like a block of wood, which will hold the branch high enough that the end you're cutting off can drop freely. When you have cut through the wood (and there is suddenly less resistance), it will be important to control the saw and keep the blade from touching the dirt – at the very least, the dirt will dull the blade in short order; in a worst-case scenario, the motor can overheat and destroy all the moving parts!

HIRING A PROFESSIONAL

If the problem limb is too high, too big, or too close to the house, or if the entire tree must be removed, it's time to call in a professional. Many communities (including Cleveland Heights) require that companies doing tree trimming and tree removal must be registered with the city.

CHECKLIST	DETAILS
Experience	Look for a company that has been in business for a while, and check references.

CHECKLIST	DETAILS
Insurance	Ask to see a copy of the company's liability insurance certificate, to protect you if someone is hurt or property is damaged as a result of their work.
Price	Get a detailed description of what they will do and the price they will charge. (You will usually be better off with a "flat price" than paying on a time-and-materials basis.) No down payment should be necessary.
Disposal	Make sure that you have discussed how the company will dispose of the wood and brush (for example, you may want to have them cut the branches into firewood and chip the remaining brush for mulch).
Stump grinding	Arrange for the company to grind out the stump – 6 to 8 inches down if you want to plant grass over the area, but about 12 inches down for a paved driveway.

Some companies may use a cherry picker and chain saws, with a crane to support and bring down the lumber, while others may use a rope and climbing saddle and hand saws. Either way, they will usually remove the branches first, from the bottom up, and then take the tree down in sections from the top.

ONE FINAL NOTE: TREE LAWNS

In Cleveland Heights, as well as some other communities, it is illegal for homeowners to trim or remove trees on their tree lawn. Check with your city if you need them to remove a tree in poor condition and plant a replacement.

If you are not sure if a tree elsewhere on your property can – or should – be saved, many of the professional tree removal companies offer free consultations. In northeastern Ohio, you might also talk with one of the Master Gardeners at the OSU Extension Service (216-429-8200); if they are not able to answer your question, they have a list of certified arborists whom you can call for professional advice.

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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