



What's My Tree Worth?

Homeowners often believe that trees in their landscape have economic value for use as lumber or other wood products. These trees, whether pine or hardwood, occupy such a large space in the landscape, that it's hard to imagine they couldn't be used to build houses, furniture or some other useful product. Homeowners may also expect the trees' value will help offset the cost of their removal, which can be very expensive.

The main impediment to selling your landscape trees is the cost of their removal. For tree removal companies, those costs include equipment rental or loan payments, maintenance of equipment and vehicles, employee salaries and insurance, taxes and fuel. Additionally, the difficulty of taking out a large tree in a restricted space increases the amount of time and costs required to remove it safely. A tree that may be worth a couple of hundred dollars at the mill is of little economic value to the removal company, which has spent a thousand dollars to take it down.

Additionally, "yard trees" often have structural defects and metal imbedded in them that can render them unusable for most wood products. Fortunately, land fill fees have become high enough that hauling trunks to the dump has become quite expensive. Trees that don't go to the mill are often converted to mulch and firewood.

Homeowners trying to find buyers for pine trees may be in a little better situation, but only if they have more than 60 large trees that are over 10 inches in diameter. In addition, the buyers must be able to drop the trees to the ground in one piece (without climbing them), and get a tractor trailer into the yard to load and haul the trees. Property owners may experience some yard or out-building damage and be willing to clean up branches and debris themselves. These are unique situations, most often in rural locations.

Should you happen to find someone interested in removing your trees "for the wood," make sure they are bonded and insured, and require a contract specifying what is to be done and who pays for damages. Pay nothing up front.

One Solution

One stopgap method that could be used when risk reduction is paramount to removing a large tree is to remove the tree's upper crown, leaving only the lower trunk standing. This phasing of tree removal can spread the cost of tree removal over a longer period of time. The trunk can remain structurally sound for some time after the branches are removed, assuming the trunk was structurally sound originally. Topping trees is never a permanent solution, however, as it creates long term structural issues within the tree. A technique called "crown reduction" may be an option if you wish to keep the tree in the landscape, but the technique usually requires pruning by a certified arborist.

Additionally, while many people on fixed incomes inquire about public programs to help defray the costs of tree removal, no such programs exist at this time.