

Before you hire a tree surgeon: a checklist

For homeowners in Chelmsford, Essex. Tick each item off at the quote visit, and note each firm's answers on page 2.

Last checked 28 September 2026. Online version with links to every source: <https://www.chelmsfordtreesurgeon.co.uk/before-you-hire-a-tree-surgeon>

1. Qualifications and competence

- ☐ The tree work industry isn't regulated by government (Arboricultural Association), so the checks below are up to you.
- ☐ HSE: anyone using a chainsaw on or in a tree should hold a relevant certificate of competence or national competence award, unless a trainee under adequate supervision. Ask to see the cards.
- ☐ City & Guilds (NPTC) chainsaw units include 0039-20 (maintenance, cross-cutting), 0039-21 (felling small trees), 0039-22 (climbing and aerial rescue), 0039-23 (chainsaw from a rope and harness), 0039-38 (from a MEWP).
- ☐ Ask when they last did refresher training (Forestry England: HSE recommends at least every five years) and whether they work to BS 3998 (tree work).

2. ARB Approved Contractor

- ☐ If they claim ARB Approved Contractor status, check the Arboricultural Association's online directory. If they're not listed, they aren't approved.
- ☐ A firm that isn't in the scheme may still be competent: treat it as one useful check, not the only one.

3. Insurance

- ☐ Seen a current public liability insurance certificate: business name matches the quote, and it hasn't expired.
- ☐ If they employ staff: employers' liability insurance from an authorised insurer (GOV.UK).
- ☐ For work near buildings, roads or power lines: asked how the risk will be managed.

4. Written quote and specification

- ☐ Quote in writing, with the business name and contact details.
- ☐ Says exactly what will be done to each tree (e.g. "reduce crown height by about 2m"), not "cut back".
- ☐ Stump: left, cut low or ground out? Branches, logs and chippings: removed or left?
- ☐ Access, ground protection, clean-up, likely date, and whether VAT is included.
- ☐ Who applies for any TPO or conservation area consent, and no work starts until it's granted.
- ☐ Agreed at home? Citizens Advice: you usually have a 14-day cooling-off period (different rules if work starts sooner).

5. Waste carrier registration

- ☐ If they take waste away: checked on the Environment Agency public register of waste carriers (upper tier). Numbers in England start with CBDU.
- ☐ Registration number noted. GOV.UK: you could be fined if your waste goes to someone not legally allowed to take it.

6. Protected trees and wildlife

- ☐ Checked Chelmsford City Council's TPO register and conservation areas map (or the tree surgeon has). Allow about 6 weeks (conservation area notice) or 8 weeks (TPO application).
- ☐ Asked how they'll check for nesting birds and bats before cutting.
- ☐ Large amounts of felling, especially woodland: asked whether a Forestry Commission felling licence is needed.

Warning signs: cold callers offering to cut a tree "today" for cash; pressure to decide on the spot; no written quote; reluctance to show certificates, insurance or waste registration; claims that a TPO or conservation area "doesn't matter".

Compare your quotes

Check	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C
Business name			
Chainsaw certificates seen (units)			
ARB Approved Contractor (directory checked)			
Public liability insurance (expiry date)			
Employers' liability (if staff)			
Waste carrier no. (CBDU...) checked			
Work specified per tree			
Stump / waste / clean-up included			
TPO / conservation area checked; who applies			
Nesting birds / bats check			
Start date			
Total price (VAT included?)			

Notes

Sources (checked 28 September 2026)

- [HSE: work equipment, training and competence](#)
- [NPTC \(City & Guilds\): chainsaw qualifications](#)
- [Forestry England: chainsaw training](#)
- [Arboricultural Association: ARB Approved Contractor directory](#)
- [GOV.UK: employers' liability insurance](#)
- [GOV.UK: dispose of household waste](#)
- [Environment Agency: public register of waste carriers](#)
- [GOV.UK: waste duty of care code of practice \(CBDU numbers\)](#)
- [Chelmsford City Council: TPO register and conservation areas map](#)
- [Planning Portal: consent under tree preservation orders](#)
- [Citizens Advice: cancelling a service you've arranged](#)

This checklist is general guidance, not legal advice. Chelmsford Tree Surgeon is an introduction service that passes quote requests to independent local tree surgeons; it doesn't carry out tree work itself, and doesn't accredit or vouch for any business. The checks in this list are for you to make. Free to print and share, but please keep this source line: <https://www.chelmsfordtreesurgeon.co.uk/before-you-hire-a-tree-surgeon>