Arborists Provide Advice on Avoiding Tree Damage During Home Construction

For Immediate Release

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Champaign, Ill. -- A house built on wooded property can be worth up to 20 percent more than the same house built on a barren lot. But with this benefit comes a precaution from the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA): When building or remodeling a house on treed property, it is important to guard against tree damage during construction.

Construction work can be harmful to nearby trees, but unless the damage is extreme, it is often difficult to detect, and it might take years for a tree to deteriorate. This makes it difficult to correlate the damage with the construction.

As a homeowner, the most important step you can take is to hire a professional arborist to assess a construction situation early in the process. An ISA Certified Arborist can work with you and your builder to determine which trees can be saved and how to protect your trees during each phase of construction.

How Trees Are Damaged During Construction

- Construction equipment can injure the above-ground part of a tree by breaking branches or tearing bark and wounding the trunk.
- The digging and trenching necessary to construct a house can cause root damage, increasing the chance of a tree falling over. The severing of a major root can cause a loss of 5 to 20 percent of a tree's root system.
- Ninety percent of the fine, water- and mineral-absorbing roots of a tree are in the upper six to twelve inches of soil. Piling soil over a root system or increasing a soil grade can smother roots. In addition, heavy equipment used in construction compacts the soil, which can dramatically reduce the oxygen levels essential to growth and function of the roots.
Erecting Barriers

The ability to repair construction damage to trees is limited. The single most important action homeowners can take is to set up construction fences around all trees they want to protect.

These fences should be placed as far away from the trees as possible, in order to protect the root systems. As a general guideline, allow one foot of space from the trunk for each inch of trunk diameter.

Instruct construction personnel to keep the fenced area clear of building materials, waste, and excess soil. No trenching or other soil disturbances should be allowed in the fenced areas.

Post-Construction Tree Maintenance

Most likely, your trees will require several years to adjust to the shock and environmental changes induced during construction. Post-construction trees are more prone to health problems such as disease and insect infestation. By talking with an ISA Certified Arborist, you can create a plan for continued maintenance during this critical time. By monitoring your trees and having them periodically evaluated, you can greatly improve the health of your wooded areas.

Despite the best intentions and most stringent precautions, trees can still be injured during the construction process. In this instance, an ISA Certified Arborist can suggest various treatments to reduce stress and stimulate growth.

Getting Advice

By hiring a professional arborist early in the planning stage, many of the trees on your property can be protected. An arborist can assess the trees on your property, determine which are healthy and structurally sound, and suggest measures to preserve and protect them. To find an ISA Certified Arborist in your area, along with other helpful tree care information, visit www.treesaregood.org.

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Champaign, Ill., is a nonprofit organization supporting tree care research and education around the world. As part of ISA’s dedication to the care and preservation of shade and ornamental trees, it offers the only internationally-recognized certification program in the industry. For more information, or to find a local ISA Certified Arborist, visit www.isa-arbor.com.