

Working Safely with Ornamental Trees: Protecting Yourself, Your Team, and Your Trees Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Working with ornamental trees isn't just about making things look pretty, it's serious business that comes with real risks. You're often using sharp tools like saws and pruners, climbing ladders or even the trees themselves, and dealing with heavy branches that can fall unexpectedly. One slip or wrong move can cause cuts, bruises, or even falls that lead to broken bones. On top of that, damaging a tree by improper pruning or dropping heavy limbs can cost time and money to fix, and hurt your reputation with customers. Taking safety seriously means protecting yourself, your coworkers, and the beautiful trees you're tasked with caring for. When everyone stays alert and follows safe practices, the job gets done right, and everyone goes home safe at the end of the day.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Trimming, pruning, or caring for ornamental trees might look peaceful, but the risks are very real—and they're often underestimated. Whether you're up on a ladder, using power tools, or working near power lines, there are plenty of ways you or someone nearby could get hurt if safety isn't taken seriously.

Falls from Height – Most serious injuries in tree work happen because of falls. Whether you're on a ladder, a lift, or climbing into the tree itself, one slip or misstep can lead to broken bones, spinal injuries, or worse. And it's not just falling from trees—uneven ground or soft soil can cause a ladder to shift suddenly.

Cuts, Lacerations, and Amputations – You're often using sharp hand tools or powerful cutting equipment. Without proper training, protective gloves, or awareness, even a routine pruning job can result in a serious cut—or the loss of a finger.

Falling Branches or Trees – Branches might fall in unexpected directions when cut, especially if the tree is damaged or diseased. Working without clear communication or standing in the drop zone can be deadly. Even small branches, if they land wrong, can cause head injuries or knock someone off a ladder.

Back Injuries and Strains – Tree care often involves awkward lifting, reaching, twisting, or holding equipment above your head for long periods. Over time, that can seriously wear down your back, shoulders, and arms, especially if you're not using proper body mechanics.

Hidden Electrical Hazards – Ornamental trees are often planted close to homes or streets, where overhead or underground power lines can pose a real threat. One wrong cut near a power line could result in electrocution.

Pests and Allergens – Some trees attract stinging insects like bees or wasps. Others may contain sap that causes skin irritation. Mold, pollen, or fungi on bark or mulch can also trigger allergies or respiratory issues.

Weather Conditions – Tree work doesn't stop just because the weather gets bad—but it should. Rain, strong winds, or ice can make branches unpredictable and climbing conditions extremely dangerous.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Tree work doesn't just require skill—it takes preparation, awareness, and the right protective gear. If you're trimming, pruning, or removing branches from ornamental trees, safety starts before your feet even leave the ground.

Use the Right PPE Every Time

- Always wear cut-resistant gloves, eye protection, and a helmet—even for quick jobs.
- Use hearing protection when working with loud tools like chainsaws or chippers.
- Sturdy, non-slip boots with ankle support can help prevent sprains when climbing or walking on uneven ground.

Inspect Your Equipment

Check ladders, ropes, harnesses, and power tools before every use. Never use dull or damaged tools—it makes the job harder and more dangerous. Make sure ladders are stable and placed on solid ground, not soft soil or uneven surfaces.

Plan the Cut Before You Make It

- Look at how a branch is leaning—never assume it'll fall straight down.
- Make sure no one is standing in the drop zone.
- Communicate clearly with your team—use hand signals or walkie-talkies if needed.

Watch Out for Power Lines

- Stay at least 10 feet away from overhead lines—more if you're using a metal ladder or pole saw. If the tree is near utility lines, call the power company or a certified arborist. Never assume a line is inactive—it could still be energized.

Protect Your Back and Shoulders

Handling large limbs, chainsaws, or gear all day wears down your muscles. Use proper lifting form: bend your knees, keep your back straight, and avoid twisting. Don't try to carry too much at once. Share the load or use equipment to lift and transport heavy debris. Give your body time to rest between tasks.

Be Alert for Hidden Hazards

- Inspect the tree for insect nests, weak limbs, or thorns.
- Scan the area for tripping hazards like roots, rocks, or uneven ground.
- Watch for weather changes—rain or wind can make work riskier.

Work with a Buddy

Never work at height alone. A second person can help steady a ladder, hand you tools, or call for help if needed. Stay within sight and sound of your team at all times.

FINAL WORD

Tree work can be risky if you're not prepared. Using the right gear, checking your surroundings, and working with care protects you, your team, and the trees. Don't rush or take shortcuts—stay alert and work smart to avoid injuries and do the job right.
