

Protect Your Landscape Investment

One of the more common complaints heard from insureds after a major property loss is a lack of homeowners coverage for valuable trees and landscaping. Most homeowners policies provide only limited coverage (with restricted perils) for this loss exposure—usually 5 percent of the dwelling limit subject to a maximum of \$500 per tree or shrub. Peril restrictions may also preclude coverage; for example, there is no landscaping coverage for a loss to landscape arising out of windstorm. Unfortunately, many trees, in particular, can be valued in the thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars. To protect this investment, consider the following risk management tips.



- If you have valuable mature trees, consider asking a licensed or certified arborist to appraise their value. Trained arborists use guidelines to value these trees, and such guidelines are recognized by insurance companies, the courts, and, in most cases, the Internal Revenue Service.
- Once you have the valuation, consider asking for an endorsement to provide higher limits and enhanced coverage for your valuable trees and other landscaping.
- Practice sound loss control for your trees. For example, topping of trees should be avoided. (Topping is the indiscriminate cutting of trees to stubs or lateral branches that are not large enough to sustain the remaining branch.)
- Hire a tree specialist to properly prune and thin out your mature trees. This action makes your trees less susceptible to disease and insects. For extremely valuable trees, consider hiring an arborist for this work. When selecting an arborist, check for his or her membership in professional organizations such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), or the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA).
- Recognize tree hazards to avoid injuries and damage to property. For examples, dead or dying trees are more likely to fall into utility lines, which could cause power outages, surges, and fires. Dead or dying trees are also likely to damage homes and could even injure people should they fall. Hiring a reputable tree specialist to remove dead or dying trees is a smart move. Get copies of the contractor's certificates of insurance for workers compensation and general liability before work begins.