How to Spot a Hazardous Tree Near Your Home

Understanding the Risks Around Your Property

Trees add beauty, shade, and value to a yard, but they can also become a threat. A tree that looks healthy from the street may have hidden problems that make it dangerous. Knowing what to look for helps you decide when to call a tree removal service before a branch falls or the whole tree comes down. This guide walks through the warning signs in a logical order, from the ground up, so you can assess each part of the tree with confidence.

The first thing to understand is that a hazardous tree is not necessarily dead. A living tree can fail if its structure has been weakened by disease, weather, or poor growth. The goal is to catch issues early, when the tree can still be saved or removed safely. A professional arborist can confirm what you see, but you can start by looking at the tree from a distance, then moving closer to inspect specific areas.



Start With the Overall Shape and Lean

Stand far enough back to see the whole tree. Look at its shape. Does it lean more than most trees in the area? A slight lean is normal for some species, but a sudden lean or a lean that gets worse over time is a red flag. Check the ground at the base on the opposite side of the lean. If the soil is pushed up or cracked, the root system may be failing. This is especially concerning if the lean points toward your house, driveway, or a spot where people gather.

Also notice the crown, the top part of the tree with all the branches. A full, balanced crown suggests good health. But if one side has fewer leaves or looks sparse, that can mean root damage or decay on that side. Dead branches in the crown are another sign. Those dead limbs can fall without warning, and they often indicate that the tree is struggling to support itself.

Inspect the Trunk for Cracks and Weakness

Walk around the trunk and look for cracks, splits, or seams. Vertical cracks that run deep into the wood are serious. They weaken the trunk and can lead to a complete break in a storm. Horizontal cracks are even worse because they show that the trunk is separating. A tree with a horizontal crack is already failing and should be evaluated by a professional right away.



Look for areas where the bark is missing or where there is a long, open wound. Old wounds can heal over, but if the wound is large and the wood underneath is soft or decayed, the tree is vulnerable. Also check for fungi growing on the trunk. Mushrooms or conks (bracket fungi) at the base or on the trunk are a clear sign of internal rot. The fungus is just the visible part; the decay inside may be extensive.

Check the Roots and the Ground Around the Tree

Root problems are often hidden, but there are clues. Look for raised soil or cracking pavement near the base. If the ground is heaving or the tree is starting to lift, the roots are losing their grip. This is common after heavy rain or in soil that stays wet. Exposed roots that are broken or decayed are another warning. A tree with damaged roots on one side has less support and is more likely to fall in that direction.

Root decay can also be spotted by looking at the base of the trunk. If the bark is loose or if there is a soft, spongy area where the trunk meets the soil, the roots may be rotting. This is a very dangerous condition because the tree can fall without any visible lean. A tree with advanced root decay may need to be removed quickly.

Examine the Branches and Crown

Now look up into the branches. Deadwood, which is branches that have no leaves and whose bark is peeling, is a hazard because it can fall at any time. Dead branches are heavier than they look and can cause serious damage. Also look for branches that cross and rub against each other. The rubbing creates wounds that let in disease and insects. Over time, the branch can weaken and break.

Crown dieback is the term for when branches at the top of the tree start dying back toward the trunk. This is often a sign of root stress or disease. If the crown is thinning or if the leaves are smaller than normal, the tree is struggling. A tree that cannot support its own crown is a candidate for removal, especially if it is near a structure.

Another thing to watch for is included bark, which happens when two branches grow too close together and the bark gets trapped between them. This creates a weak union that can split apart under wind or snow. Look for a V-shaped fork where the two branches meet. If there is bark inside the crotch, that is included bark. A U-shaped union is much stronger.



Consider the Target Area

The risk a tree poses depends partly on what is around it. A tree with minor defects in an open field may not be a hazard, but the same tree next to a house, a garage, a power line, or a playground is a different story. The target area is the space that would be hit if the tree or a branch falls. The closer the target, the more important it is to act. A tree that overhangs your roof or sits near the driveway needs a lower threshold for concern.

Felling direction is a term professionals use when removing a tree. They plan the direction it will fall to avoid hitting anything. But if you are just assessing, think about which way the tree would fall if it went over. If that direction leads to a structure or a busy area, the tree is a higher priority. Even a healthy-looking tree can fail in extreme weather, so keeping an eye on the target area is part of good home maintenance.

What to Do When You Spot a Problem

If you see any of these warning signs, the next step is to get a professional opinion. A certified arborist can climb the tree, probe for decay, and give you a clear picture of the risk. They can also tell you whether the tree can be saved with pruning and care, or if removal is the safest option. Do not try to remove a large tree yourself. Tree work is dangerous, especially when the tree is already weakened. A tree removal service has the training, equipment, and insurance to do the job safely.

When you call a tree service, ask about their process. A good company will inspect the tree, explain what they see, and give you a plan. They should also talk about debris cleanup and

stump grinding if those are part of the job. For homeowners in the Dallas Georgia area, treeserviceindallas.com offers these services, including emergency storm response and debris cleanup. That kind of local support matters when a storm has already caused damage and you need help fast.

Regular inspection is the best way to avoid surprises. Walk your property after every big storm and look for new cracks, broken branches, or changes in lean. Spring is a good time for a thorough check because the leaves are out and problems are easier to see. Keep an eye on young trees too. A tree that grows with a bad structure from the start can become a hazard later. Pruning young trees to encourage a strong central leader and wide branch angles reduces the risk down the road.

Knowing When to Act

Not every defect means the tree has to come down. Some can be managed with cable bracing, pruning, or other treatments. But if the tree has advanced decay, a severe lean, or major root damage, removal is often the only safe choice. The cost of removal is small compared to the cost of repairing a damaged roof or, worse, an injury. If you are unsure, call a professional. They can give you peace of mind and help you make the right call.



For homeowners in Dallas Georgia who need a reliable tree removal service, treeserviceindallas.com is a local option that understands the area's trees and common issues. Whether you need a tree taken down after a storm or just want an assessment of a leaning oak, having a trusted number to call makes the process easier. A little attention now can prevent a big problem later.

Remember that tree hazards are not always obvious. A tree can look fine from the road but have a rotten core or a cracked trunk. That is why a systematic check, from the ground up, is so valuable. Look at the lean, the trunk, the roots, and the branches. Think about what the tree could hit if it fell. And when in doubt, get help. Your home and your family are worth the effort.