

Tree Stump Branch Removal Chipping Lopping Pruning South East Melbourne Victoria Qualified Arborist Vegetation Management Expert OB TREES Specialist James O'Brien

Tree surgeon reveals signs that your trees need pruning

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Keeping a well-maintained garden requires a bit of discipline, and this is doubly true where trees are concerned. While over-abundant growth of lawns or shrubs might look a bit untidy, leaving trees unattended for long periods of time can sometimes turn them into hazards waiting to happen.

Melbourne arborist and tree surgeon James O'Brien is passionate about sharing his extensive knowledge of tree care, accumulated over a decade of experience, "It's a good idea to inspect the trees on your property from time to time for signs that they might be in need of attention. Identifying those in need of pruning can save you a lot of headaches and cost later on, due to the damage wrought by trees that have been left to their own devices. Fortunately, there are some easily identifiable, tell-tale signs that your trees might be due for pruning."

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Broken branches or deadwood are one of the first and most obvious signs to look out for. Branches can be damaged during storms or heavy winds and once weakened in this way, they can be very dangerous as they are liable to break even further. Dead limbs or whole sections of the tree could be an indication of disease or a pest infestation. Sometimes pruning can prevent further spread of the disease or decay but if left too long, the whole tree may need to be removed.

Misshapen or leaning trees need to be carefully assessed - an unbalanced tree is more likely to break easily and cause damage. A slight lean is usually safe, as trees have a built-in compensating mechanism - they produce reaction wood which offsets the stress caused by the tilted posture of the tree. In the case of a significant lean, trees aren't always able to produce enough reaction wood or produce it fast enough to counter the force of gravity. This is especially true if a tree shifts suddenly, and mounded soil at the base of the tree is a sure sign of a very hazardous tree.

Codominant leaders are V-shaped junctions and are prone to failing more often than wider branch junctions, particularly if they form part of the main trunk. Wider angles of attachment that are U-shaped indicate stronger branch unions than V-shaped ones.

Too much growth and wandering branches are common reasons for scheduling some tree work. In urban areas where trees don't need to compete with other plants for sunlight, they will often grow outward instead of upward. This results in branches becoming too long and heavy which could cause them to break under their own weight. Branches that have grown such that they reach over your house or another structure, or near power lines, are a potential safety and fire hazard and should be attended to promptly.

Horizontal or vertical cracks can indicate a potential hazard and large cracks require immediate assessment, especially horizontal ones. Cracks should be attended to without delay as it's extremely likely that the structural damage will spread.

Mushrooms growing on the trunk or roots indicates that a fungus has colonised the tree. Some fungi may coexist amicably but others can digest the cells of the tree at a rapid rate, compromising the structural integrity. This can make a tree very hazardous and susceptible to being blown down in a storm or heavy winds

Cavities in the trunk may be an indication of internal decay. This is not always harmful, but in the case of cavities caused by destructive fungi, the safety of the tree could be compromised. Spotting wildlife in a tree that does not produce fruit or flowers could be an indication that the tree has an internal cavity.

"If one or more of your trees display any of the above signs, it won't necessarily indicate the removal of the tree. Some may still be stable enough as they are, while others can often be improved with corrective pruning or the use of supportive cables to strengthen weak branch junctions. If in doubt, it's best to call in the services of a certified arborist that can assess the tree and determine the correct approach," says O'Brien.

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