What should you do after a tree has been cut down?

Once a tree has been felled, you are left with a stump and a root system that can take years to break down naturally. The options available depend on your plans for the space, your budget, and how quickly you want the area usable again. Some methods remove the stump entirely, others speed up decay, and a few leave the stump in place while hiding it from view. Each approach has trade-offs in time, effort, and cost.

Stump grinding, the most common professional option

Stump grinding uses a machine with a rotating cutting disk that chips the stump away to well below ground level. The result is a pile of wood chips and a hole that can be filled with soil and grassed over. This is the option most people choose because it removes the stump completely and leaves no large root mass near the surface. The machine grinds to a depth of about 20 to 30 centimetres, which is enough for most lawns and gardens. Deeper grinding is possible if you plan to build or pave over the area later. A local specialist in **stump grinding Gisborne** can assess access and root spread before starting, because the machine is heavy and needs a clear path to the stump.

After grinding, the wood chips can be taken away or left as mulch for garden beds. The hole will settle a little over time, so you may need to top up the soil after a few months. Stump grinding leaves no large pieces of wood underground, which means no risk of termites or fungal rot spreading to nearby trees or structures. It is also quick, most single stumps are finished in under an hour, and the area can be used again within a day or two.





Stump removal, digging out the whole root ball

Stump removal involves digging around the stump and cutting or pulling the entire root ball out of the ground. This is more disruptive than grinding because it requires heavy equipment or a lot of manual labour. The hole left behind can be large, especially for a big tree, and you will need to backfill it with soil. Stump removal is the best choice if you want to plant a new tree in the exact same spot, because grinding leaves wood chips mixed into the soil that can rob nitrogen as they decompose. It is also necessary if you are removing foundations, pathways, or retaining walls that sit near the stump. The main downside is the cost and the mess. The root ball can weigh several tonnes, and getting a machine into a tight backyard can be difficult.

Chemical stump removal, slow but low-effort

If you are not in a hurry, chemical stump removers can speed up the natural decay process. These products contain potassium nitrate, which softens the wood and makes it porous. You drill holes into the stump, pour in the chemical, and add water. Over several weeks, the stump becomes spongy and can be broken apart with an axe or a shovel. This method works best for small to medium stumps that are not near desirable plants, because the chemicals can affect nearby soil. It is also a job that needs patience, most stumps take four to six weeks before they are soft enough to split. And you still have to dispose of the remaining wood pieces yourself. For someone who wants to avoid heavy machinery and has no urgent plans for the space, this can be a cheap, low-effort option.

Natural decay, letting nature take its course

Simply leaving a stump to rot can take anywhere from three to ten years, depending on the tree species, climate, and whether the wood is in contact with the ground. Some trees, like pine, decay relatively quickly. Hardwoods such as oak or eucalyptus can last much longer. If you choose this route, you can speed things up by cutting the stump as low as possible, covering it with soil, and keeping it moist. Fungi and insects will break down the wood over time, but the stump can become a home for pests like termites, which may later move to buildings or other trees. That risk makes this option less popular in residential areas, especially close to houses.

Grinding vs removal, which to choose

The choice between grinding and removal often comes down to what you plan to do with the space. If you want a lawn, a garden bed, or a simple grassed area, stump grinding is usually enough. The wood chips from grinding can be used as mulch, or you can have them removed. If you plan to build a shed, a patio, or a driveway, you may need full removal so that the ground

can be properly compacted. The same applies if the stump is close to a fence, a retaining wall, or a building, the roots can lift or crack these structures as they decay, so removing them entirely is safer. A professional service like Tree Removal Gisborne can inspect the site and advise on the best method for your situation.



What about the roots?

After a tree is cut down, the roots stop growing but can still cause problems. They can push up paving, block drains, or continue to send up suckers (new shoots from the root system). Grinding the stump does not remove the entire root system. Most roots will die and decay naturally once the stump is gone, but large roots near the surface may need to be cut out if they are causing issues. If you are worried about roots damaging underground pipes, it is worth having a plumber or a root specialist survey the area before you decide on a method. Removing the stump early reduces the chance of root growth causing trouble later.

Can you burn a stump?

Burning is an old method that is rarely used today because of fire danger and smoke nuisance. It works best on dry, seasoned stumps in a cleared area away from buildings, trees, and overhead wires. You drill holes, fill them with kerosene or a similar accelerant, and let the stump burn slowly over several days. This method is not legal everywhere, and many local

councils restrict open fires. It also leaves a hole and a layer of ash that can be alkaline and affect soil pH. For a residential property, burning is usually the least practical and most risky option.

Landscaping over a stump

If you do not want to remove the stump at all, you can landscape around it. Cut the stump low to the ground, cover it with a thick layer of soil, and plant grass or ground cover over it. Over time, the stump will decay underneath, but the soil may sink as it does. Another option is to turn the stump into a feature, plant ferns or succulents in the hollow centre, or cap it with a concrete or wooden top to make a small table or stool. These solutions work best for stumps that are not in a high-traffic area and do not pose a tripping hazard.



Before making a decision, consider how soon you need the area usable, what your budget allows, and whether the stump is near buildings, pipes, or other structures. For most

homeowners, stump grinding offers the best balance of speed, cost, and convenience. It leaves the site ready for replanting or turfing within a short time, with minimal disruption to the surrounding garden. If you are unsure, a local specialist in **Tree Removal Gisborne** can take a look and recommend the approach that fits your property and your plans.

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