

By DLC Resources, Inc.

Topping vs Pruning



Sprouting prevents starvation



Topped instead of pruned

Unjustified Reasoning

Many people “top” trees because they grow into utility wires, interfere with views/sunlight, or because it is the cheaper option. Unfortunately, people don’t realize the detrimental impact this has on trees. We, DLC Resources, would like to elaborate on “topping” and what you can do to prevent it.

The Ugliness of It All

Tree topping is where the main branches are cut back to only stubs. Many arborists say it’s the worst thing you can do for the health of a tree. It starves the tree by drastically reducing its food-making ability and makes the tree more vulnerable to insects and disease. The stubs will rapidly replace leaf loss for food and shade. The end result is ugly, bushy, weakly attached limbs that usually grow back higher than the original branches. Often, the topping process is self-defeating. This quick and easy fix costs less in the short-term, but requires more frequent future maintenance. Additionally, the loss of property value, the liability from weak limbs, and the expense of removing or replacing the tree proves topping is drastically more costly than proper pruning.

Preventative Action

There are two ways to avoid the “topping” of trees. First, find the right tree for the right space. For example, when a tree will grow 40 feet tall, it is best to place it away from power lines and other structures. The other key is proper pruning. It is critical to start this early in the life of a tree, but no earlier than a year. Proper pruning should occur roughly every three years on a regular basis to maintain the health of the tree.

“The appearance of a properly pruned tree is like a good haircut: hardly noticeable at first glance.”

The Arbor Day Foundation, 2006

For trees that are already mature, crown reduction options are available. Excessive growth can be removed without topping the tree. We strongly suggest consulting a certified arborist for all your pruning needs. To obtain a list of Certified Arborists in your area please visit <http://isa-arbor.com/findArborist/verifyArbByLoc.aspx>.

With good pruning comes increased property value, less long-term maintenance and decreased liability.



The ideal time of year to prune is between October and April.

Proper Pruning Under Wires



Don't Top Trees. 2006. The Arbor Day Foundation. 8 May 2008 < <http://www.arborday.org/trees/NineNum1.cfm>>.