

DON'T TOP TREES!

Topping of trees is perhaps the most harmful tree pruning practice known. Topping is cutting back branches to stub or lateral branches that are not large enough to assume the terminal role.

The most common reason for topping is to reduce the height and/or size of a tree. Homeowners often feel the tree will fall on their homes. Topping is not a good method of height reduction and does not reduce the hazard. In fact, topping will make a tree more hazardous in the long run.

Topping stresses trees. Topping removes the leaf bearing crown, because leaves are the food factory of a tree. Removing them can temporarily starve a tree. Or if topped back to far can actually starve a tree to death. The severity of the topping triggers the tree to a survival mode. The tree needs to put out a new crop of leaves A.S.A.P. The tree activates latent buds, forcing the rapid growth of multiple shoots below each cut. If the tree does not have enough stored up energy it will be seriously weakened and may die. A stressed tree is very vulnerable to insects and disease.

Large wounds expose sapwood and heartwood to attacks. The tree may lack enough energy to chemically defend the wound. Some insects are actually attracted to the chemical signals trees release. Creating stubs by topping are usually too large to "wall off" or compartmentalize. This causes decay and the decay organisms now has free path to move down the branches. Branches within the crown of a mature tree produce thousands of leaves to absorb sunlight. Topping removes the branches of leaves suddenly exposing the tree to high levels of light and heat. The result may be sunburn of the tissue leading to cankers, bark splitting and death to some. Topping creates hazardous trees by kicking at their survival mechanism. Topping produces multiple shoots that come at a great expense to the tree. These shoots develop from buds near the surface. Unlike normal branching that develops in a socket of overlapping wood tissues. These new shoots are anchored only in the outmost layers of the present branches. The new shoots grow quickly, in some species up to 15' in one year. Unfortunately, the new shoots are weak and prone to breaking. The irony is that while

the goal was to reduce the height to make the tree safer, it has been made more hazardous than before.

Sometimes a tree must be reduced in size. There are proper techniques. If a branch must be shortened, it should be cut back to a terminal node supporting lateral branch or back to the point of origin. Keep in mind that large cuts are involved and the tree may not be able to close over and compartmentalize the wounds.

The best is to avoid topping. Thin the tree out so the wind can blow through it.

Tree City USA & Planting & Care of Trees

Don'tTopTrees