

Topping

Topping is described as “*the drastic removal of large branches with little regard for location of the pruning cuts*”. Although topping trees is a common practice in many communities, it is **NOT a professional method for pruning trees**. It is not a practice that should be performed by any certified arborist because there are professional pruning techniques to limit the height of a tree. Topping practices do not follow the rules of pruning that protect the branch collars or that stipulate size limits for pruning to lateral branches, thus they are not made in a professional manner and leave stubs of branches in the canopy. These stubs are not protected from decay organisms, and open the tree to invasion by insects and decay. This decay can penetrate to the lower branches and trunk of the tree and cause its rapid decline and possibly death. **NEVER TOP OR SHAPE A SHADE TREE!!!** Some ornamentals can be shaped and pruned.

Topping or “rounding over” is mistakenly believed to control the height of a tree. However, the new stems will soon grow to be the same height as the tree is genetically programmed to be. But the new stems will be numerous and crowded and weakly attached at the point of topping. Many of these will die back and fall off during windy weather.

Tree Topping Examples:

1.)

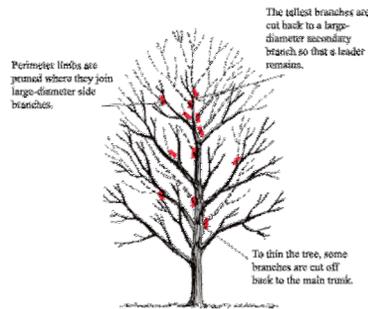


2.)



Proper Pruning Technique:

Head-back or Crown Reduction Pruning:



Eight Good Reasons NOT to "Top":

-  **Starvation:** topping removes so much of the crown that it upsets the crown-to-root ratio and limits the food-making ability of the tree.
-  **Shock:** the canopy of leaves casts shade on the internal branches. Topping removes the shade and exposes the internal bark to sun scald.
-  **Pests and Disease:** topped branches have large wounds that cannot seal nor defend the wound from insects and decay.
-  **Weak Limbs:** new sprouts develop at the edges of the cut branches, and are weakly attached. If the stub rots, the sprouts will break even sooner.
-  **Rapid New Growth:** height control by topping is doomed to fail. The new branches grow fast and furiously to the original height, but much more crowded and less branch stability.
-  **Tree Death:** some species, *e.g.* beech, oak, ash, locusts and other hardwoods do not tolerate topping and the reduced foliage may cause the tree to die.
-  **Ugliness:** topped trees are so disfigured that they will never recover their original grace.
-  **Cost:** topping can be done quickly because good decisions about pruning are not needed. But trees that die will need replacement, the ugly trees reduce property values, the dead stubs become liabilities, and more maintenance will be needed.