



Forest Facts

TREETOPPING

February 2008

Tree topping - a common but unwise practice.

Tree topping is a common but detrimental practice that damages both the health and value of landscape trees. Tree topping - the indiscriminate cutting back of tree branches to stubs - weakens trees, leaves trees vulnerable to insects and disease and shortens the life span of trees. Other names for tree topping are stubbing, topping off and lopping, but by any name, topping is the worst thing to do to the health of a tree.

The Oregon Department of Forestry's urban forestry staff offers the following information on why topping hurts trees, and where to get information on proper pruning techniques.

Topping starves and shocks trees.

It removes much of the tree's protective "crown" of leaves and branches. The loss of foliage starves the tree, which weakens the roots. Also, without its "crown," a tree cannot protect its sensitive bark from damaging sun and heat. The result is the splitting of the bark and the death of branches.

Topping is expensive.

Each time a branch is cut, numerous long, skinny young shoots (called suckers or watersprouts) grow rapidly back to replace it. A topped tree must be done and re-done every few years, and eventually must be removed when it dies or the owner gives up. A properly pruned tree stays "done" longer, since the work does not stimulate an upsurge of regrowth. Proper pruning actually improves the health and beauty of a tree, costing you less in the long run.

Topping reduces the appraised value of your tree.

A tree, like any landscape amenity, adds to the value of your property. Using the International Society of Arboriculture's guidelines for evaluation, appraisers subtract hundreds of dollars from the value of a tree when it's been topped.

And, not only do topped trees reduce property values, they also eventually increase liability because of safety issues. In many cities, topping is banned because of the

public safety factor and the potential for lawsuits. You can even sue a tree company for wrongfully topping a tree.

Topping is ugly.

A tree's natural form is the source of its beauty, a function of uninterrupted taper. Unfortunately, a tree's 90-year achievement of natural beauty can be destroyed in a couple of hours. Topped trees appear disfigured and mutilated. And, the freshly sawed look is just the beginning of the eyesore. The worst is yet to come, as the tree re-grows a witch's broom of ugly, straight suckers and sprouts. Sadly, once topped, a tree will never return to its natural shape.

Although tree topping is an unwise practice, many people mistakenly "top" trees because they grow into utility wires, interfere with views or sunlight, or simply

grow so large that they worry the landowner. Paul Ries, urban forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry, hopes people can learn to recognize and appreciate the advantages of proper tree pruning and give up the practice of tree topping.

"Topping creates hazard trees, but proper tree pruning creates healthy trees," says Ries. "Proper pruning can remove excessive growth without the problems topping creates."

If the trees on your property are in need of pruning but you're unsure just how to go about it, contact a certified arborist in your area for assistance.

For more information on trees, tree care, and pruning, visit <http://www.treesaregood.com> or www.pnwisa.org

