

The Truth On Tree Topping

As I drive around Clarksville, I am devastated by the amount of topped trees that I see. So many once beautiful and majestic trees butchered in their prime. Tree topping is a widespread epidemic, not only in Clarksville, but in many communities across the nation. I am here to tell you that this is not an acceptable tree care practice and needs to be stopped. Topping only hurts trees. It can send trees plummeting into a downward spiral, which ends in disease, death, and removal.

Before I go any further, I must distinguish between proper tree pruning and tree topping. When you prune a tree correctly, you selectively remove branches in regards to tree growth, structure, and biology. On the opposite end of this spectrum is tree topping. Topping is the removal of tree parts above and beyond a predetermined height and width. This is done without consideration of tree growth, structure, or biology, and results in the excessive removal of vital parts of the tree.

With the excess removal of these parts, the tree can starve. Current professional standards state that no more than 25% of material should be pruned from a tree in one year. Removing more than 25% can affect the tree's food making capability, and also weaken its defenses against disease and insects.

Topping a tree usually removes 70-80% of a tree at one time. If taking more than 25% is bad, you can picture what 70-80% can mean to a tree's health. It terribly disrupts all of a tree's natural processes and defense mechanisms. The tree has to put most of its energy into growing back what was lost, and does not have much left to combat insect and disease.

When a tree is topped, the typical result is a flush in new growth. Many people see this as a positive. They think that the tree must be healthy to put on so much amazing growth. This avenue of thought is totally wrong.

The flush of growth is the tree's desperate attempt to replace what was viciously ripped away from it. The tree no longer has all of the leaves that it once had to produce the food that it needs. To keep from starving, this is the only recourse. Since all this activity is concentrated on producing new growth and leaves, the new stems do not form their protective layers properly, making it extremely prone to disease and insect activity.

There is a second problem to all of this new, lush growth. The new growth comes from buds that are just underneath the bark surface. As the new branches grow, they are not strongly attached to the tree. These new branches are prone to ripping out by snow, wind, and ice.

When a healthy tree forms branches, the branches become laminated into the tree. Each year the trunk of the tree grows around the branches, making for strong branch attachment. In a topped tree this process is negated, and leads to a structurally weak tree.

Another very negative outcome from topping is that it negates a tree's natural healing process. Tree topping ignores the process in which a tree heals. The result of this are large wounds that never heal properly, and take an extremely long time to close, if they ever do. Avenues for the infiltration of insects and disease are opened throughout the tree.

As can be seen, tree topping has many adverse effects on tree health. It is

a technique that has been denounced by all professional tree care organizations across the globe. Not only is it extremely harmful to trees, it also viciously rips away all of a tree's inherent, natural beauty. Tree topping is a butchering technique that must be stopped, not only here, but in all parts of the nation. If you are going to have your trees pruned, and the service you are considering say they top trees, do not hire them. Anyone can mutilate your trees. Find a professional that knows proper techniques to care for your trees. This way your trees will remain healthy, and will pass on their majestic beauty and shade for generations to enjoy.