

**DON'T TOP TREES!**

**Topping is the WORST thing you can do for the health of your tree.**

Topping, also called stubbing, round over, heading, tipping, or dehorning, is a tree “trimming” practice where limbs are severely cut back within a tree's crown. The tree’s crown is often severely reduced in both height and spread leaving large stubs, flush cuts and bark rips throughout the crown; all of which are improper arboricultural tree care practices. Unfortunately, this practice is very widespread in communities throughout northeastern Wisconsin.

Trees are “topped” for several reasons. Many times it is done to control the height and spread of a tree because there is a fear that the tree is “too big” and will damage property. Trees are also topped because they interfere with power lines, store fronts, signs, or views.

Others top trees because they know it spurs new growth. They see the resulting rapid and thick growth as an indication of a healthy tree. There is a belief that this is the correct way to “trim a tree”, “that’s the way it has been done for years”, or the neighbor had it done. Topping the tree to control the height or to promote new growth is a misconception and it will only cause the tree to die prematurely.



**RAPID AND WEAK GROWTH:**

Topping does spur a flush of new growth. The resulting sprouts are often more numerous than the normal new growth would have been, are more weakly attached, and grow very rapidly. The tree ends up returning to its former height very quickly, but with a far denser and weaker crown which will require more frequent maintenance than if the tree is pruned correctly. Trees that are topped are far more likely to fail than a tree that is properly pruned.

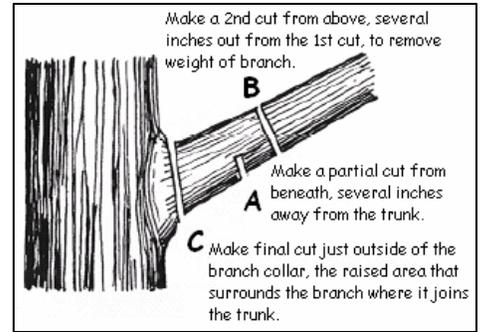
**HEALTH PROBLEMS:**

Topping leaves large stubs. The tree has difficulty protecting these stubs from decay fungi, which can spread into the rest of the branch, further weakening the tree. Because so much of the crown is removed at one time from topping, the trees ability to make the food it needs, through photosynthesis, is also dramatically reduced. Rapid sprouting is a typical result as the tree tries to replace the branches lost from this severe cutting.

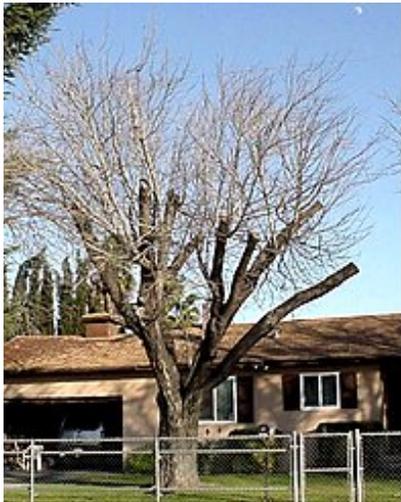
The tree's natural defense mechanisms are located in the area where one branch meets another; the branch collar. When a branch is cut correctly, the tree is able to set up natural barriers that protect against insects and diseases. A knowledgeable arborist also will not remove more than one-third of a tree's crown during pruning to reduce the need for the tree to expend unnecessary energy producing sprouts.

**UGLINESS:**

Topping disfigures trees. Even with the new growth, the tree will never regain the natural grace and character of the species.



*Proper tree pruning*



**SHOCK:**

The sudden exposure of the remaining branches to the sun causes wounding called sunscald. This wounding creates even more opportunities for insects and diseases to attack and kill the tree.

**COST:**

Topping is easy when compared to applying the skill and judgment of good pruning practices by a professional arborist. Anyone that knows how to use a chainsaw can top a tree, however not everyone can properly prune that same tree. Topping is faster and can be done by the unskilled tree worker, therefore it is often less expensive in the short run. The true costs of topping are hidden including:

-  increased future maintenance costs
-  reduced property value
-  removal/replacement expense when the tree dies
-  and the risk of liability from weakened branches and decayed wood

When looking for an arborist or tree service, ask how they intend on pruning your tree. A reputable arborist or tree service will refuse to top a tree, even if the customer insists on it. They would rather lose that customer than irresponsibly damage the tree...and their reputation.

For more information on properly pruning trees contact the Village of Howard Forestry Division or visit one of the links on our webpage.



*Don't let this happen to your tree!!!*

**HOWARD PARKS, RECREATION and FORESTRY DEPARTMENT  
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