

# Don't Top This!!!

It is that time of year when people's eyes and thoughts go from inside the house to outside in the yard. In a neighborhood with mature trees residents are often solicited by "tree crews" offering to top their trees for a reasonable fee.

Topping a tree is one of the worst things anyone can do. Years ago, topping was an acceptable practice, but as time has proven to arborists, topping a tree can provide a host of problems for mature trees such as the ones in Forest Ridge, and the homeowners.

Tree topping's intended purpose is to shorten the branches in an effort to reduce the tree's height. Today, there are several alternatives which include a careful initial selection of a smaller tree that would fit the intended space. Also, pruning early in the tree's life of branches that could pose a problem can help. Owners can do branch thinning early in the growing season to ward off potential problems.

Topping a mature tree creates several conditions that invite trouble later on. It creates an environment which invites branch stub decay. The foliage necessary for food production will be removed, severely limiting the tree's ability to maintain its health. Bark that was at one time shaded by the leaves becomes exposed to the sunlight, scalding it and making the branch stub attractive to wood boring insects.

One of the most obvious signs of topping is the appearance of water sprouts just below the cut. These shoots grow quickly, bringing a topped tree back to its original height faster and denser than a properly pruned tree. They are attached weakly to the tree and break off easily in storms. Permanent disfiguration will result.

Alternatives to topping include thinning out selected branches by cutting them back to their point of origin or to a side branch of suitable size. It reduces the height of the tree and spread while maintaining the intended shape. Cuts won't be as noticeable, water sprouts will not be as common, the tree will have better health and pruning will be less frequent. Experts point out that cuts should not be made where the branch comes off the trunk or another branch (the collar). The cuts should be made as close as possible to the collar without injuring or removing it.

The tree's manner of healing a wound of any sort is the formation of new cells that make up callus tissue. This tissue closes up the wound. This is essential to tree health and vitality. When a cut is made to a branch by topping, there is no collar, and no defense against disease and decay. The tree is structurally weakened. Tree paint applied after the cutting does not prevent decay, promote closure, or deter insect entry.

The best solution is to find a reputable firm that has knowledge and experience with trees and have them prune your trees properly. Don't top them, prune them!!

