

Tree Toppings

TOPPED OR CROWN REDUCED?

As I drive through my neighbourhood I am shocked at what some people have done to their trees. Once grand specimens have been topped, decapitated and bare they are testament to our misinterpretation of what we expect plants to do. Plants have a habit of growing; reaching a mature size, why then do we need to restrict their growth? The answer is often quite simple, we often plant the wrong plant in the wrong place and the resulting giant frightens us.

As a professional I am often questioned about reducing the size of large trees, and the need for topping. The concern often expressed by home owners is that the tree is getting too big and needs to be shortened. I am 6'3" and enjoy my height, fortunate that the same question is not asked of me. My question to individuals who want to 'top' a tree is what they plan on doing with the space above the trees. The reply is "nothing" then my response is "leave the tree alone".



Topping trees, or as it is called by professionals, crown reduction is best left to the Certified Arborist, for it is often delicate work that must be done in a balanced manner, respecting the structural integrity of the tree crown. Crown reduction can correct imbalances in the tree form and enhance structure and potential growth. The haphazard lopping off of limbs is akin to horticultural butchery,

for few but the professionals realize that any kind of pruning encourages growth. In reducing the crown, a growth spurt can occur, the result being excessive weak growth, water sprouts and sucker growth, all of which are undesirable, hence the need for balanced, thoughtful pruning



Years of training and practice are invested in becoming a professional Arborist. Adam Beer from Arbortech Professional Tree Care instructs a student at Fanshawe College in proper tree climbing techniques.

According to Adam Beer foreman with Arbortech Professional Tree care, certified Arborist, forestry technician and instructor at Fanshawe College, "trees should not be topped, but should be crown reduced, making smaller cuts but adhering to

proper pruning practices". Adam further suggests that "pruning should occur to a suitable lateral as opposed to a cut in the middle of a stem" Cuts made in the middle of a stem will not heal correctly opening the limb to rot and eventual structural decay. The larger the limb removed, the longer the healing time of that would greater the potential for structural deterioration.

Homeowners are often limited in what can be pruned by the tools they have at hand, limbs that may be difficult to reach are cut below desirable points thus creating further problems.



A severely topped paper birch, tree limbs were not pruned to laterals (joints in the stem), this tree will become severely stressed and fail.

All pruning is best done when the trees are young; it involves envisioning the tree in latter years and anticipating when limbs will be a problem. By anticipating imbalances in the tree, overhanging or interfering limbs at a young age, then the stress of pruning and the cost is often reduced. Pruning large trees is expensive since it involves professionals with many years of training and expensive, specialised equipment: a bucket truck today according to Ian Johnston, owner of Arbortech Professional Tree Care costs in excess of \$150,000.00

Large trees in particular frighten us, street trees in my hometown, Strathroy that reach massive heights are often erroneously slated for execution. There is often little wrong with these trees, except their age and size. Imagine if such attitudes

prevailed in Europe where 400 year old oaks are common, or where, on the west coast the giant redwoods stand. Where would the legacy be?

A tree is a substantial investment in the future, it is a promise to future generations that we thought of them and left them a green gift. Protect this investment by leaving the delicate work of pruning to the certified Arborist, after all, how many of us have the knowledge to perform surgery on our friends?



A Red Obelisk Beech, a tree for confined spaces needing little or no pruning during its lifetime. The Royal Botanical Gardens Arboretum, Burlington, is a good place to see trees such as this. In London a walk around the Sherwood Fox Arboretum at the University of Western Ontario or the Gardens of Fanshawe College are great places to view a wide variety of trees, many of which are identified.

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