

# 9 Things You Should Know About Trees\*

## **#1 - Don't Top Trees!**

Never cut main branches back to stubs. 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.

Unfortunately, the topping process is often self-defeating. Ugly, bushy, weakly attached limbs usually grow back higher than the original branches.

Proper pruning can remove excessive growth without the problems topping creates. In addition, many arborists say that topping is the worst thing you can do for the health of a tree. It starves the tree by drastically reducing its food-making ability and makes the tree more susceptible to insects and disease.

The appearance of a properly pruned tree is like a good haircut: hardly noticeable at first glance.

## **#2 - 1/3 and 1/4 Rules of Pruning**

Never remove more than 1/4 of a tree's crown in a season.

Where possible, try to encourage side branches that form angles that are 1/3 off vertical (10:00 or 2:00 positions). For most species, the tree should have a single trunk.

Ideally, main side branches should be at least 1/3 smaller than the diameter of the trunk.

If removal of a main branch is necessary, cut it back to where it is attached to another large branch or the trunk. Do not truncate or leave a stub. See No.3 for how to make a pruning cut.

For most deciduous (broadleaf) trees, don't prune up from the bottom any more than 1/3 of the tree's total height.

## **#3 - How to Make a Pruning Cut**

### **Large Limbs:**

A: Make a partial cut from beneath.

B: Make a second cut from above several inches out and allow the limb to fall.

C: Complete the job with a final cut just outside the branch collar.

### **Small Branches:**

Make a sharp clean cut, just beyond a lateral bud or other branch.

## **#4 - The Value of Mulch**

A tree's best friend, mulch insulates soil, retains moisture, keeps out weeds, prevents soil compaction, reduces lawnmower damage, and adds an aesthetic touch to a yard or street. Remove any grass within the mulch area, and area from 3 to 10 feet in diameter, depending on tree size. Pour wood chips or bark pieces 2 to 4 inches within the circle, but not touching the trunk.

## **#5 - Where Roots Really Grow**

A: Because roots need oxygen, they don't normally grow in the compacted oxygen-poor soil under paved streets.

B: The framework of major roots usually lies less than 8 to 12 inches below the surface.

C: Roots often grow outward to a diameter one to two times the height of the trees.

**\*Source: The National Arbor Day Foundation**

## **#6 - Girdling Kills Trees**

Girdling is any activity that injures the bark of a tree trunk and extends around much of the trunk's circumference.

Such injuries, often caused by lawnmowers and weed trimmers, destroy the tree's most vital membranes, the layers that conduct water and minerals from the roots to the leaves and return the food produced by the leaves to the rest of the tree.

## **#7 - How to Plant a Containerized Tree**

If a tree is planted correctly, it will grow twice as fast and live at least twice as long as one that is incorrectly planted.

Ideally, dig or roto till an area one foot deep and approximately 5 times the diameter of the root ball. The prepared soil will encourage root growth beyond the root ball and results in a healthier tree.

In transplanting, be sure to keep soil around the roots. Always handle your tree by the ball, not by the trunk or branches. Don't let the root ball dry out. Help prevent root girdling by vertically cutting any roots that show tendencies to circle the root ball.

After placing the tree, pack soil firmly but not tightly around the root ball. Water the soil and place a protective 3-foot circle of mulch around the tree.

## **#8 - How to Plant a Bare-root Tree**

It is best to plant bare-root trees immediately, in order to keep the fragile roots from drying out. If you can't plant because of weather or soil conditions, store the trees in a cool place and keep the roots moist.



**1:** Unpack tree and soak in water 3 to 6 hours. Do not plant with packing materials attached to roots, and do not allow roots to dry out.



**2:** Dig a hole, wider than seems necessary, so the roots can spread without crowding. Remove any grass within a three-foot circular area. To aid root growth, turn soil in an area up to 3 feet in diameter.



**3:** Plant the tree at the same depth it stood in the nursery, without crowding the roots. Partially fill the hole, firming the soil around the lower roots. Do not add soil amendments.



**4:** Shovel in the remaining soil. It should be firmly, but not tightly packed with your heel. Construct a water-holding basin around the tree. Give the tree plenty of water.



**5:** After the water has soaked in, place a 2-inch deep protective mulch area 3 feet in diameter around the base of the tree (but not touching the trunk).



**6:** Water the tree generously every week or 10 days during the first year.

## **#9 - Your Street Trees May Be City Trees**

If you live in a town or city, the trees near the street (often between the sidewalk and street), are probably city-owned. The city should have a program for planting and caring for these trees. You should support your city forestry program and encourage your town to be a Tree City USA.

Respect local ordinances as to what trees can be planted, how to prune, etc. Encourage your town to fully fund a quality community forestry program.