

Archive for October, 2009

Don't Top Your Trees !!!!

Saturday, October 3rd, 2009

Tree topping is a sure way to kill a tree long before its natural life is over. Yet, it still occurs throughout Missouri, because many homeowners do not understand why it is bad, or how expensive it can be.

Contrary To Popular Belief,

** Topping a tree **WILL NOT** reduce storm damage and the tree **WILL NOT** be easier to maintain in the future

Fact: Topped trees can regain their original height in as little as two years. The fast-growing, extremely long and loosely attached shoots resulting from topping are more susceptible to breakage and storm damage. This is because they are weakly connected (if at all) to the internal structural system of the tree. Ultimately, a topped tree requires much more attention in the future (and, thus, more expense) than a properly pruned tree. Topped trees need to be topped again and again.

** Topping **WILL NOT** invigorate a tree.

Fact: Topping immediately injures a tree and results in health problems such as insect invasions and rot. Even the seemingly healthy new shoots are immediately infected by decay organisms, resulting in their inability to withstand storm damage; nor do they contribute any nutrition to the tree.

** Topped trees **WILL NOT** add value to your property.

Fact: Topped trees can become hazardous very quickly, and cause damage (either to your property or other's), which makes them a liability rather than an asset. Losing an asset always reduces value.

Don't take chances with your trees. Listen to the experts:

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**DON'T
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Why You Shouldn't Top Trees
Saturday, October 10th, 2009

1. Starvation – Topping removes so much of a tree's crown that it adversely affects the ability of the tree to manufacture food.
2. Shock – A tree's crown is like an umbrella that shields much of the tree from the direct rays of the sun. By suddenly removing this protection, the remaining bark tissue is so exposed that scalding may occur.
3. Insects and Disease – The large stubs of a topped tree have a difficult time forming callus tissue. Without the formation of callus, the open wounds become more susceptible to invasion by harmful insects and rot.
4. Weak Limbs – The sprouts that develop after topping develop from epicormic buds that do not originate from the normal vascular system of the tree. The resulting shoots are, therefore, poorly integrated, if at all, with the internal structural system of the tree, and are much more susceptible to breakage than are normal branches, limbs and twigs.
5. Rapid New Growth – Many species can recover the original height of the topped tree in as little as two years, thus negating the effect that was desired (i.e. reducing the size of the tree).
6. Tree Death – Some species of trees are less tolerant of topping than others, and will die within a year or two.
7. Ugliness – A topped tree is a disfigured tree. The landscape and the community are robbed of a valuable asset.
8. Cost – A topped tree costs much more, in the long term, because it must be done over and over again; and the tree still dies way too soon anyway.

Topping will not solve the problem of a tree being in the wrong place. When a tree has become too tall or wide for its location, the best solution is to remove it completely and replace it with a species that will fit the location through all stages of its life.

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Alternatives To Topping

Saturday, October 17th, 2009

I hope most folks are convinced, by now, that topping is bad for trees. Once convinced of something, however, most people want to know what they can do to avoid topping in the future. There are times

when the size and shape of a tree need to be controlled. With care and skill, this can be accomplished without marring the trees beauty or usefulness. Responsible pruning even contributes to the health and safety of a tree. In general, there are several alternatives available to prevent the urge to top:

1. Start out right by planting tree species that will fit your available space **when they reach maturity**.
2. Begin proper pruning early in the life of a tree.
3. To slow growth of a tree, avoid the use of nitrogen fertilizer.
4. Prune properly and regularly. A light pruning every three years will keep your trees in a healthy condition. It will also have less drastic effects on both the landscape and your financial assets compared with neglecting older trees or resorting to topping.

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Reducing Tree Damage In Future Storms
Saturday, October 24th, 2009

During the past few years, Missouri has experienced some bad winter ice storms, which devastated many trees in the communities (and rural areas too!) that were hit the hardest. Even well-managed trees were affected somewhat, but to a much lesser degree than those trees that received little or no proper care. The well-managed trees were also easier, and less expensive, to rehabilitate, and fewer of them had to be removed from the community landscape. Proper care and planning ahead pays off when the ice man comes calling.

You can reduce the amount of damage your tree(s) will sustain in a storm by following a few simple guidelines:

1. **Think ahead when planting.** Avoid species prone to breakage. Silver maple, boxelder, poplars, and Bradford pears have brittle wood that breaks easily. While these fast-growing species, and others, are popular, they are highly susceptible to storm damage, and should not be planted. There's an old adage that says, "if it grows fast, it goes downhill fast too." Use species recommended for your area. Many sources of information are available to guide your selection.
2. **Prune Early.** Regularly prune dead or weakened limbs and occasionally thin excess branches from the tree's crown, especially when the tree is young. The goal is to produce a well-shaped tree with the center of gravity squarely over the trunk, and a crown that lets wind pass through rather than catching it like a sail.
3. **Encourage Good Branch Angles.** Narrow angles between branches signal a point of future weakness. Use proper pruning techniques to eliminate the poorest looking branch when two are growing too close and at a sharp angle.
4. **Remove Rubbing Branches, Suckers, and Watersprouts.** Suckers are shoots that originate at the base of the trunk, and compete with the main trunk. Watersprouts are shoots that grow after pruning (this doesn't happen often if the pruning is done properly), and they are always prevalent after a tree is topped. Both suckers and watersprouts grow rapidly, but lack internal strength; and are thus easily broken in storms. **Don't Top Trees!**
5. **Prune Properly.** Guidelines for proper pruning techniques are available from a number of sources. I've also covered them in previous blog entries. Pruning properly is the single best thing you can do to prevent future storm damage; once you have selected, and planted, the right tree in the right place.