

Tips to Avoid Tree Topping

Planting

1. Check out the location - proximity to buildings, utility lines, other trees.
2. Select trees or shrubs to fit. Proper height, slow-to-moderate growth, fit for soil.
3. Know where the sun is and how it travels across your property during the various seasons of the year.
4. Choose from varieties suggested by experts* - don't rely on what looks good in a neighbor's yard.
5. Consider your neighbor's needs also.
6. Consider community infrastructure (walkways, streets**)/public safety (traffic visibility).

Pruning:

1. Limit pruning, but remove dead or broken branches when planting new trees.
2. As trees grow, start removing lower branches (years 2-3). Reduce multiple leaders to a single top. Except for maples, elms and birch trees, try to prune live branches in dormancy - mid-winter or early spring.
3. Maintain a central leader or single stem and avoid trunk damage during early years.
4. Don't remove more than 1/3 of the total branches at any time. Prune weak trees less.
5. Continue to remove lower branches to maximize ground clearance (year 10).
6. Maintain recommended watering, mulching, weeding and pest control at all times. ***

Handling the Unexpected:

1. Whatever the natural or unnatural cause that brings you to consider topping - don't.
2. Reduce a tree's size with alternate or "lateral branch" removal, pruning at the fork.
3. Do not make flush cuts (right next to the tree trunk). Instead cut outside of the branch bark ridge or branch collars. Do not remove the branch bark ridge or branch collars.
4. Make clean, angled cuts with sharp tools at the branch collar. Do not paint cuts.
5. If severe topping looks like the only solution to your particular problem, consider cutting the tree down and starting with a new one. You will have to eventually.

* Urban Foresters and Arborists usually belong to one (or both) of these groups - International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and National Arborist Association (NAA). The ISA has a certification program that comes from study and a lengthy examination. These and other urban forestry professionals can help not only in choosing the right trees in the first place, but handling pruning and potential problems that might result from storms or other property changes.

** Utility companies, with years of experience, suggest the following:

- Large trees (over 60 feet tall) - Plant 45 feet from utilities
- Medium trees (30-60 feet tall) - Plant 35 feet from utilities
- Small trees (less than 30 feet tall) - Plant 15 feet from utilities
- Note: When planting around a house or building consider proximity to drainage pipes, driveways, walks, air conditioning, solar heating units, gardens, southern exposure and neighbors' yards.

*** Learn about proper water, soil conditioning.