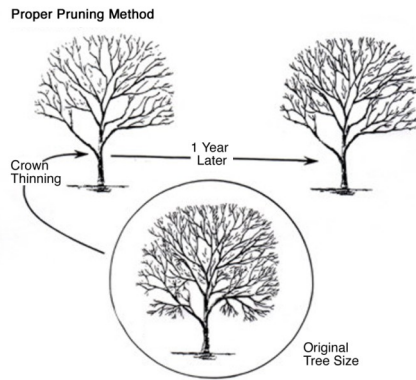


Hiring an Arborist

Pruning large trees can be dangerous. If pruning involves working above the ground or using power equipment, it is best to hire a professional arborist. An arborist can determine what type of pruning is necessary to improve the health, appearance and safety of your trees. A professional arborist can provide the services of a trained crew, with all of the required safety equipment and liability insurance.



You are always home in Pinecrest!



There are a variety of things to consider which selecting an arborist:

- Membership in professional organizations such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), the National Arborist Association (NAA) or the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA).
- Certification through the ISA Certified Arborist Program.
- Proof of insurance
- A list of references (which you should check)
- Avoid using the services of any tree company that advertises topping as a tree service provided or uses tree climbing spikes to climb trees that are being pruned. Climbing spikes can damage trees, and their use should be limited to trees that are being removed.

Village of Pinecrest

Village Council
Cindy Lerner, *Mayor*
Bob Ross, *Vice Mayor*
Joseph M. Corradino
Jeff Cutler
Nancy L. Harter

Why Topping Hurts Trees

Informing the Homeowner
Learn and Get Informed

This brochure explains why topping is not an acceptable pruning technique, and offers some better alternatives.

For more information about pruning visit www.isa-arbor.com

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Topping is perhaps the most harmful tree pruning practice known. Yet despite more than 25 years of literature and seminars explaining its harmful effects, topping remains a common practice.

What is Topping?

Topping is the indiscriminate cutting back of tree branches to stubs or lateral branches that are not large enough to assume the terminal role.



The most common reason given for topping is to reduce the size of a tree. Often homeowners feel that their trees have become too large for their property. People fear that tall trees may pose a hazard. Topping, however, is not a viable method of height reduction, and certainly does not reduce the hazard. In fact, topping will make a tree more hazardous in the long term.

Topping Stresses Trees

Topping often removes 50-100% of the leaf-bearing crown of a tree. Since the leaves are the “food factories” of a tree, this can temporarily “starve” a tree. The severity of the pruning triggers a sort of survival mechanism. The tree activates latent buds, forcing the rapid growth of multiple shoots below each cut. The tree needs to put out a new crop of leaves as soon as possible. If a tree does not have the stored energy reserves to do this, it will be seriously weakened and may die.

A stressed tree is more vulnerable to insect and disease infestations. Large, open pruning wounds expose the sapwood and heartwood to attack. The tree may “defend” the wounds against invasion. Some insects are actually attracted to stressed trees by chemical signals.

Topping Causes Decay

The preferred location to make a pruning cut is just beyond the branch collar at the branch’s point of attachment. The tree is biologically equipped to close such a wound provided the tree is healthy enough and the wound is not too large. Cuts made along a limb between lateral branches, create stubs with wounds that the tree may not be able to close. The exposed wood tissues begin to decay. Normally, a tree will “wall off” or compartmentalize the decaying tissues. But few trees can defend the multiple severe wounds caused by topping. The decay organisms are given a free path to move down through the branches.



This limb was pruned too close to the main trunk and into the branch collar area. A large amount of callus tissue formed, but the wound never healed completely. The hole within the doughnut-like growth became an open invitation to insects and diseases and future decay of the heartwood within the tree.

Topping Creates Hazards

The survival mechanism that causes a tree to produce multiple shoots below each topping cut comes at a great expense to the tree. These shoots develop from buds near the surface of the old branches. Unlike normal branches that develop in a “socket” of overlapping wood tissues, these new shoots are only anchored in the outmost layers of the parent branches. Unfortunately, the shoots are very prone to breaking, especially during windy conditions. Essentially, making the tree more hazardous than before.



Topping Makes Trees Ugly

The natural branching structure of a tree is a biological wonder. Trees form a variety of shapes and growth habits, all with the same goal of presenting their leaves to the sun. Topping removes the ends of the branches, often leaving ugly stubs. A tree that has been topped can never fully regain its natural form.

Topping is Expensive

The cost of topping a tree is not limited to what the perpetrator is paid. If the tree survives, it will require pruning again within a few years. It will either need to be reduced again, or storm damage will have to be cleaned up. If the tree dies, it will have to be removed. Topping is a high maintenance pruning practice. Also, there are some hidden costs of topping. One is the reduction in property value. Healthy, well maintained trees can add 10-20% to the value of a property. Another potential cost of topped trees is the potential liability. Topped trees are prone to breaking and can be hazardous. Since topping is considered to be an unacceptable pruning practice, any damage caused by branch failure of a topped tree may lead to a finding of negligence in a court of law.

Alternatives to Topping

There are times when a tree must be reduced in height or spread. If practical, branches should be removed back to their point of origin. If a branch must be shortened, it should be cut back to a lateral that is large enough to assume the terminal role. A rule of thumb for this is to cut back to a lateral that is at least 1/3 the diameter of the limb being removed.

