

Winter Tree Trimming

As trees continue to grow, they occasionally stray from their natural shape. This is not problematic as long as the trees are periodically trimmed and shaped to keep small problems from becoming bigger, more expensive problems in the future.

To the average person, pruning may seem like a difficult and confusing task, and if done incorrectly, can cause even more problems. Our tree trimming services include preventative and corrective pruning, but NOT topping, as this is harmful to the health of your trees. Our professionals can trim any tree less than 20 feet tall. Pruning trees much larger than that, requires special equipment.

Why Do We Prune?

1. To remove dead, cracked, or broken branches.

Getting these removed as quickly as possible helps to prevent insects and keeps diseases from getting started. This also allows the weakened areas to seal over quickly.

2. To remove watersprouts or suckers.

Suckers are not harmful to the tree, just unsightly. After pruning the suckers from a tree, we apply a preventative product to the fresh cut that keeps most suckers from coming back the rest of the season. Watersprouts, on the other hand, can become hazardous if not addressed and allowed to get larger. They form a poor attachment to the main stem, and as they get bigger and heavier, they are the first branches to fail in wind, snow, or ice storm. After a tree has been topped, most of the branches that grow back are watersprouts, which is why we discourage this practice.

3. To remove crossing branches.

Branches should radiate from the inside of the tree outward, with enough space between branches that as they expand, they will not rub against each other. When branches rub against each other, dead spots begin to occur on one if not both of the branches. These branches can become hazardous when they break off at the dead spots.

4. To maintain its natural shape.

Some trees just need a little help maintaining their natural shape. Lopsided trees or trees with an occasional wild branch can be easily corrected when the tree is young, but if ignored, they often mature into lopsided trees.

5. To remove double leaders.

Trees that start from the ground with a single trunk and continue upward to the very tip with a single, straight, main stem are often thought of as the most structurally sound specimens. Though this statement oversimplifies things a bit, it's a good place to start. Some tree varieties do tend to grow this way, but many do not. This is part of maintaining the tree's natural shape. You need to know your tree varieties and how

they are supposed to grow, and only worry about double leaders when appropriate. Multiple-trunked trees (clumps) and trees that begin to branch off naturally at a lower height can still be structurally sound trees it just depends on the variety.

6. **To “limb up” where and when desired.**

Trees grow from the branch tips up and out. They do not grow from the ground up. The height at which the initial bottom set of branches attaches to the trunk will remain the same over the entire life of the tree. They do not move up higher as the tree gets older. Because trees need these side branches in order to build trunk caliper (diameter), trees can only be “limbed up” a little at a time. Removing side branches too fast will create a tall whippy stem that will bend over or break with the first big snow or ice load.

So how do you know when to trim or remove the lower branches? Well, it depends on the variety and it’s a bit of a judgment call, however there is a general rule that can be applied to help make this decision, called **the one-third rule**. This rule dictates that side branches should be trimmed off before they become one-third the diameter of the trunk or the main branch from which you are trimming them. So to build caliper, you will want to leave side branches on as long as possible, but remove them before they reach the one-third mark.