CITY OF RIVERSIDE
TREE CARE PROGRAM
FOR CITY TREES

WHY TOPPING HURTS TREES

Tree topping is the practice of removing whole tops of trees or large branches and/or trunks from the tops of trees in order to reduce height. This detrimental practice oftentimes leaves stubs or lateral branches that are too small, causing significant stress and potential safety issues .

Topping Makes Trees Ugly

Topping destroys the natural form of a tree. Without leaves (for up to six months of the year in temperate climates), a topped tree appears disfigured and mutilated.

Starvation

Topping can remove 50 to 100 percent of a tree's leaf-bearing crown. Leaves are the food factories of a tree and removing the crown can starve a tree.

Sunburn

Branches within a tree's crown produce thousands of leaves to absorb sunlight. When removed, the remaining branches and trunk are suddenly exposed to high levels of light and heat which can hurt the tree.

Fragile Branches

New shoots are produced by the tree by the old branches. However, they are weakly attached and prone to breaking, especially during windy or icy conditions.

Decay

Topping may leave tree stubs, which may not be able to close and heal. This will lead to decay.

It's Expensive

The cost of topping a tree is not limited to only the job cost. Some hidden costs of topping include:
- Increased maintenance costs.
- Reduced property value.
- Increased liability potential.

Prune Your Trees Instead

Pruning Trees | Proper pruning is essential in developing a tree with a strong structure and desirable form. Trees that receive the appropriate pruning measures while they are young will require less corrective pruning as they mature.

When to Prune | Most routine pruning to remove weak, diseased, or dead limbs can be accomplished at any time during the year with little effect on the tree.

Generally, **no more than 25% of the crown should be removed at once**, and less for mature trees.

If pruning involves working above the ground or using power equipment, it is **best to hire a professional arborist.**

Common reasons for pruning are to:
- **Remove Dead Branches**
- **Improve Form**
- **Reduce Risk**

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For more information on the City of Riverside Tree Care Program, visit
RiversideCA.gov/Trees