

Expert Resources

For more information about caring for your trees and brochures that explain proper tree pruning and tree selection in greater detail, contact one of these organizations:

- Trees Virginia – <http://www.treesvirginia.org/>
- International Society of Arboriculture – <http://www.isa-arbor.com/>
- Mid Atlantic Chapter of International Society of Arboriculture – <http://www.mac-isa.org/>
- Virginia Department of Forestry – <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/urban/index.htm>
- Arbor Day Foundation – <http://www.arborday.org/>
- USDA Forest Service – <http://www.fs.fed.us/ucf/>
- VA Tech Urban Forestry Gateway – <http://urbanforestry.frec.vt.edu/resources.html>
- Urban Forestry South – <http://www.urbanforestrysouth.org/>
- Tree Care Industry association – http://www.tcia.org/public/main_about.htm
- Alliance for Community Trees – <http://actrees.org>
- Tree Owners Manual – http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/uf/tom/090202_tom_hr.pdf
- Natural Resource Stewardship for Homeowners Associations Manual – <http://www.davey.com/hoa>

EXPERTS AGREE

**DON'T
TOP YOUR
TREE**

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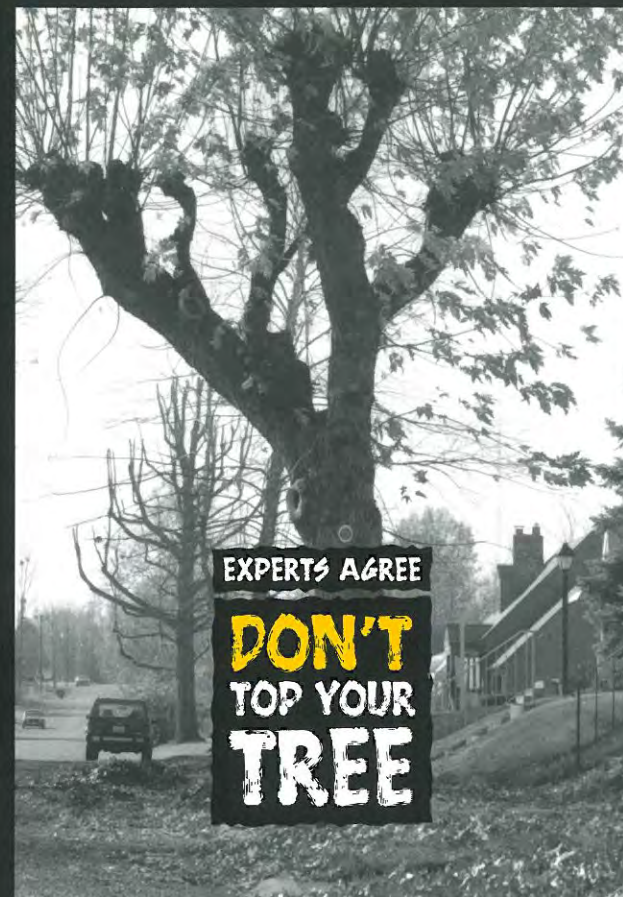


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Artwork source: "Why Topping Hurts Trees" brochure, International Society of Arboriculture.

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**The Only Thing
Tree Topping
Reduces
Is Your
Property Value**



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

The “Experts Agree: Don’t Top Your Tree” campaign is designed to inform the public about the hazards of tree topping, while providing wiser alternatives to this destructive and counter-productive practice.

What Is Tree Topping?

Tree topping is the drastic removal, or cutting back, of large branches. It is intended to correct the problem of a tree outgrowing its space. Unfortunately, this action immediately creates large, open wounds that subject the tree to invasion by harmful insects and rot (decay). The reduction in leaf surface also causes damage to the root system, and reduces the tree’s ability to absorb the nutrients and water it needs for proper growth and development. The multiple branch wounds caused by topping provide open access to decay organisms that the tree cannot defend against. The health of the tree is started on a downward spiral that results in premature death of other limbs and branches. These can fall on your house, or your neighbor’s, or damage other personal property, resulting in liability claims against you. Ultimately, a topped tree dies long before its time, and may be more costly and dangerous to remove than a tree that dies from natural causes.



Leaving a stub provides open access to decay organisms.

Tree Topping vs. Proper Pruning: No Contest

Other names for this undesirable practice include: stubbing, heading, tipping, dehorning, lopping or roundover. Whatever the name, topping is detrimental to the health of a tree.

Topping should never be confused with proper pruning. A topped tree is easy to spot – the tree’s natural shape has been destroyed. A properly pruned tree looks as if no work has been done at all. With proper pruning, an arborist will carefully select and remove branches while maintaining the tree’s natural shape and beauty. Don’t be fooled into believing that you’re not getting your money’s worth if you don’t see a lot of branches lying on the ground when a trained arborist is working on your trees.



Shoots that grow below a topping cut are weakly attached and often become a hazard.

Proper pruning is an important part of caring for — and protecting — the health of your trees. It is also the least expensive way to protect an investment (your trees) that can add as much as 15% to the value of your property if managed properly.

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 others), which makes them a liability rather than an asset. Losing an asset always reduces value.

There Is A Better Way: Alternatives to Topping

As a homeowner, you must inform yourself and make wise choices to protect your house and property – including your trees. A tree is a long-term investment that can add “curb appeal” and environmental benefits to your property. Because of this, tree care requires careful decisions and the occasional advice

If the height of a tree must be reduced, all cuts should be made to strong laterals or to the parent limb. Do not cut limbs back to stubs.



and service of a professional tree care provider. Here’s what you can do to protect your trees:

- Hire only competent, insured, and certified tree care professionals. The best way to do this is by finding out if the individual or company carries professional certification, particularly from the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), or Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) accreditation for the company. ISA conducts training courses and certifies those who pass a rigorous exam.
- When seeking a tree care service, if they offer topping, don’t let them near your trees.
- Never, ever let yourself be pressured by bargains. The old saying “you get what you pay for” truly applies in the tree care business. The only way to truly get your money’s worth is to have it done right the first time.

An Ounce of Prevention: Right Tree, Right Place

Every species of tree has specific height, width, and spacing needs in order to grow into a healthy mature specimen. Carefully matching your tree selection with site conditions – proximity to other trees, buildings, or above and below ground utilities – can prevent problems before they occur, and eliminate the temptation to take harmful, drastic, and expensive action later on. Virginia Department of Forestry and many utility companies provide guidelines for planting trees and recommendations for types of trees to fit your needs. By applying the practice of putting the “right tree in the right place” to begin with, you can not only avoid the heartache of seeing a valuable (and perhaps beloved) tree destroyed long before its time, but you can also avoid the unnecessary expenses involved with having trees topped again and again – only to lose them too soon anyway.