

# PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT!

Good reasons not to top trees  
and alternatives to consider.

DNR Urban & Community Forestry Program



Purple leafed plums - topped



Natural form of a purple leafed plum



# What is tree topping?

- Topping is the practice of severely cutting back or removing large branches in mature trees.
- Other names for topping include: stubbing, heading, hat racking, rounding over



# Why is topping bad?

- Topping creates wounds that permanently damage trees.
- Topping leads to decay, rot and often the death of the tree.
- Poorly attached branches are prone to breaking and become a hazard.



A result of topping; poorly attached re-grown branches, significant decay, death.

# Why is topping bad?

- If it doesn't kill the tree, topping results in aggressive re-growth of branches, thicker and more numerous than those that were removed.
- Maintenance costs rise; trees need continual pruning.



Rapid re-growth requires continuous maintenance

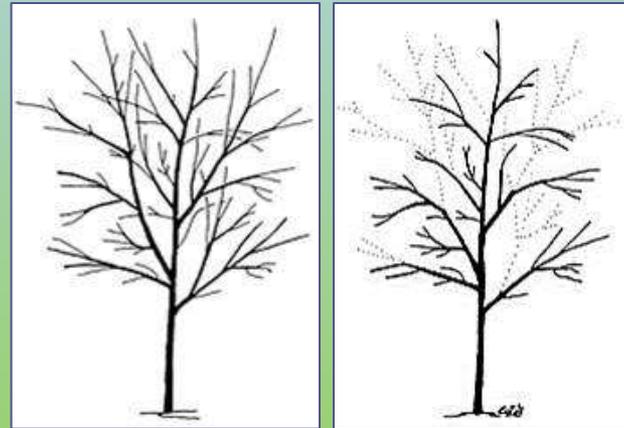
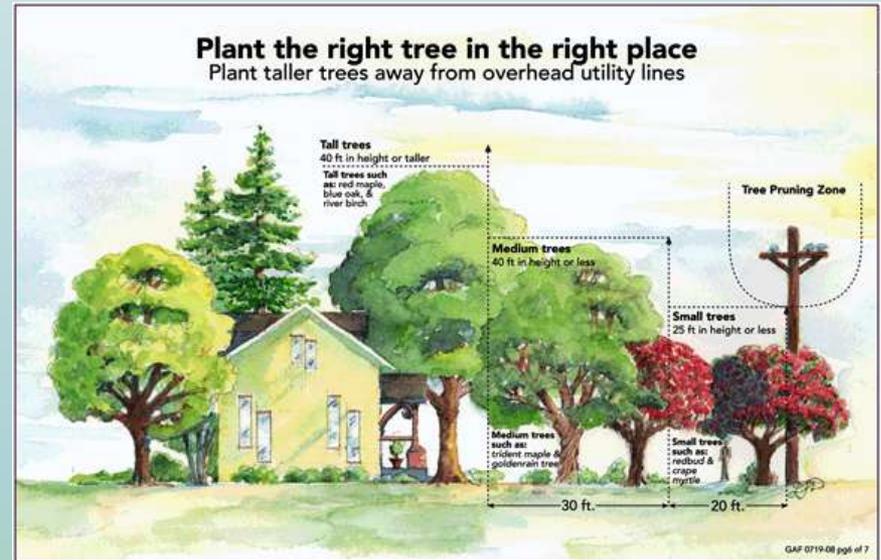
# Why is topping bad?

- Disfigured trees can reduce property value.
- If trees are not maintained, they become a liability.
- Topped trees are ugly!



# Alternatives to Topping

- Start out with the right tree in the right place; don't plant big trees in small spaces.
- Begin structural pruning early in the life of a tree; prune regularly.



Start structural pruning at a young age

# Hire a Professional!

- Certified Arborists practice responsible pruning techniques:



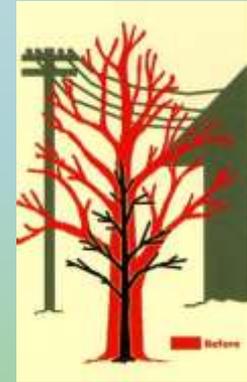
**Crown Cleaning:**  
Ideal for trees with broken branches, or that look unkempt.



**Crown Thinning:**  
Ideal for creating more light, reducing weight in areas of high winds, or creating a view window.



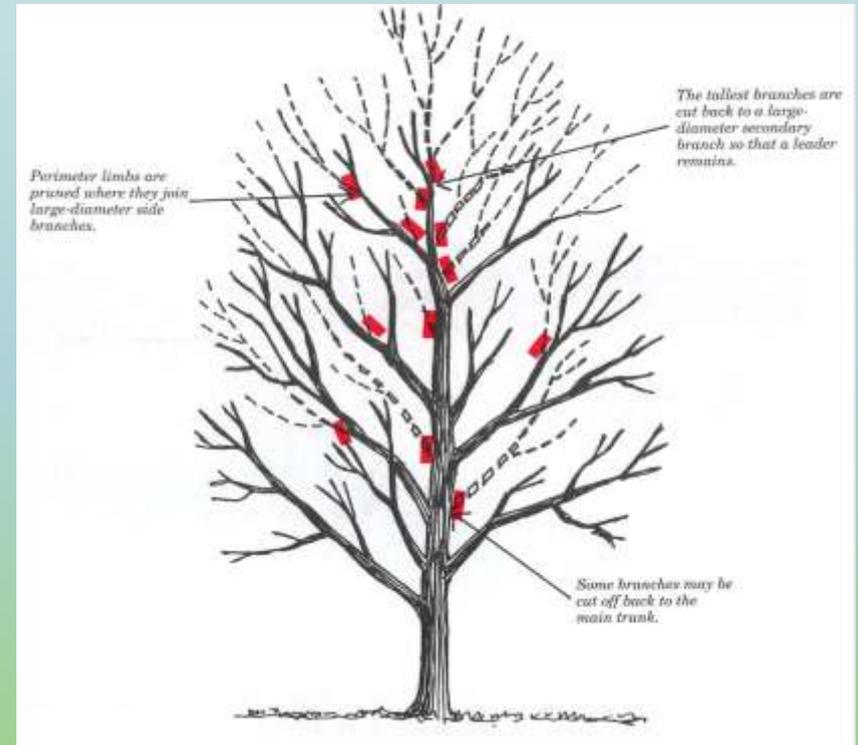
**Crown Raising:**  
Ideal for providing visibility, or sidewalk or driveway clearance.



**Remove & Replace:**  
May be necessary, if a tree is no longer appropriate for its current site.

# Hire a Professional!

- If necessary, certified arborists may reduce the height of a tree using a technique called crown reduction.
- Tree limbs are pruned to junctions of branches *at least 1/3 the diameter* of the branch being removed.
- Branches are cut for a specific purpose, with a goal in mind.



# Resources

- Get informed!

- Consumer information bulletins from the International Society of Arboriculture: <http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/topping.aspx>
- Arbor Day Foundation tree pruning guide: <http://www.arborday.org/trees/pruning/>
- Find out more about “Why Tree Topping Hurts Trees:”  
<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/spfiles/sp549.pdf>
- How to prune trees, US Forest Service  
[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/Spfo/pubs/howtos/ht\\_prune/htprune.pdf](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/Spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/htprune.pdf)

- Read a book!

- “An Illustrated Guide to Pruning, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition” by Ed Gilman

- Find a Professional!

- Find a certified arborist in your area:  
International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)  
<http://www.treesaregood.org/findtreeservices/FindTreeCareService.aspx>  
ISA Pacific Northwest Chapter: <http://www.pnwisa.org/>



# For more information, contact DNR Urban & Community Forestry program:

- Sarah Foster, Program Manager  
[sarah.foster@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:sarah.foster@dnr.wa.gov)  
360-902-1704,
- Linden L. Mead, Urban & Community Forestry Specialist  
[linden.mead@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:linden.mead@dnr.wa.gov)  
360-902-1703
- Nicki Eisfeldt, Urban & Community Forestry Assistant  
[nicholene.eisfeldt@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:nicholene.eisfeldt@dnr.wa.gov)  
360-902-1330

## Remember: Experts agree, DON'T top your tree!

[www.dnr.wa.gov](http://www.dnr.wa.gov)

Images for this presentation courtesy of:  
Arbor Day Foundation <http://www.arborday.org/>  
City of Olympia, WA "Stop Tree Topping" campaign  
"Experts agree, don't top your tree" slogan  
developed by the Missouri Community Forestry  
Council & Forest ReLeaf of Missouri

