



established 1938

# National Arborist Association

Dedicated to the Advancement of Commercial Tree Care Businesses

3 Perimeter Road, Unit 1  
Manchester, NH 03103

Tel: (603) 314-5380  
1-800-733-2622  
Fax: (603) 314-5386

E-mail: [Naa@natlarb.com](mailto:Naa@natlarb.com)  
Web site: [www.natlarb.com](http://www.natlarb.com)

Contact: Robert Rouse, Staff Arborist  
E-Mail: [Rouse@natlarb.com](mailto:Rouse@natlarb.com)

***For immediate release***

## Topping and Lion's Tailing are Forbidden

Picture this: You visit your manicurist because your nails are too long. She agrees you have a problem and recommends you have your whole arm removed. Better yet, have both arms removed, just in case. While, technically, this solves the problem, it demands too high a price. Apparently, this "professional" isn't sufficiently knowledgeable to offer less severe, more appropriate solutions.

"Similar types of 'solutions' are sometimes misapplied to tree care problems," says Peter Gerstenberger, director of safety and education at the National Arborist Association (NAA). Based in Amherst, NH, the NAA is the national association for tree care company owners and operators. The practice known as "topping"—the lopping off of large parts of a tree—is the tree care equivalent to amputation. Trees are often topped to height or shape, leaving branch stubs and little or no foliage.

Gerstenberger points out that "Lion's-tailing" is another practice that severely damages trees. In this case the inner foliage, branches, and limbs of a tree are stripped bare. The lion-tailed tree has the unnatural form of a giant umbrella, with the remaining foliage limited to the ends of the branches! The limbs left on the tree are long and bare except for a characteristic "tuft" of foliage at the end, giving the appearance of a lion's tail.

According to Gerstenberger, consumers today are more knowledgeable and increasingly refuse to allow their trees to be topped. Unfortunately, some so-called professionals practice lion's tailing, which isn't as instantly recognized as a bad practice by consumers.

Gerstenberger notes that topping should not be confused with proper crown reduction pruning, which will safely reduce a tree's size and redirect its growth. Nor should lion's-tailing be confused with proper thinning, which is the selective removal of branches to decrease weight and wind resistance. Generally proper pruning of either type will not remove more than 25 percent of the tree's foliage.

Gerstenberger says you should not top trees because doing so:

- \* leaves large exposed wounds that the tree can't readily close.
- \* ruins tree structure
- \* removes too much foliage and disrupts the tree's energy storage for future growth.
- \* stimulates vigorous new growth, which is weakly attached and prone to breakage
- \* increases tree maintenance costs.
- \* destroys the tree's appearance and value

You should not lion's tail trees because:

- \* limbs become weak and may break
- \* increased sunlight on the interior of the tree can cause sunscald
- \* it stimulates vigorous new growth on the inner portion of the tree that is weakly attached and prone to break.
- \* it removes too much foliage disrupting the tree's energy reserve for future growth
- \* it destroys the tree's appearance and value.

Homeowners who are looking for someone to assess their landscape and make recommendations should consult a professional arborist. Contact the National Arborist Association (NAA), a 63-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. The NAA has more than 2,800 members who recognize stringent safety and performance standards, and are required to carry liability insurance. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the "Locate Your Local NAA Member Companies" program. You can use this service by calling (800) 733-2622 or by doing a zip code search at [www.natlarb.com](http://www.natlarb.com).

*You can download a .pdf version of this press release at [www.natlarb.com](http://www.natlarb.com)*