

Tree Pruning with a Purpose

Beautiful spring weather entices us to be outside in our landscapes and gardens. We take stock of which plants are looking good and which plants seem to need a little help. It is natural to want to “do” something to help a tree – prune it, fertilize it, polish it – we can’t help wanting to touch it in some way.

Pruning is an oft needed maintenance treatment for good tree health, and to keep your tree and yard safe and looking good, but pruning without a good reason is not good tree care practice. Pruning just because your neighbor is doing it may not be beneficial for the tree, and could result in too much live tree tissue being removed. This can cause the tree to become stressed, and perhaps decline.

In fact, industry tree pruning standards (ANSI A300) say no more than 25 percent of a tree’s foliage should be removed in a single season, and if the tree cannot tolerate a lot of pruning, even less should be removed. When determining how much pruning your tree can tolerate, an arborist may consider if the tree:

- is healthy
- is still growing rapidly or has matured and slowed its growth
- had its roots severed or damaged recently or in the past
- suffers from disease
- is a species tolerant of heavy pruning

A good arborist will work with you to set an objective for the pruning job (i.e., what you want accomplished when the work is done). Pruning objectives usually include one or more of the following:

- reduce risk of damage to people or property
- manage tree health
- provide clearance for vehicles or roadways
- improve structure
- increase or improve aesthetics
- restore shape

Once tree pruning objectives are established, the arborist can provide specific details on how to prune your trees, without harming them, to get the desired result.

These questions can be overwhelming to those not familiar with shade and ornamental tree pruning. A qualified tree care expert trained in tree and woody plant health care can answer these questions, as well as help you with your tree pruning goals. Make sure to ask for tree pruning to be done according to ANSI A300 standards.

Find a professional

A professional arborist can assess your landscape and work with you to determine whether your trees and shrubs would benefit from pruning. Contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture since 1938. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA has the nation’s only Accreditation program that helps consumers find tree care companies that have been inspected and accredited based on: adherence to industry standards for quality and safety; maintenance of trained, professional staff; and dedication to ethics and quality in business practices. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the “Locate Your Local TCIA Member Companies” program. You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP Code search on www.treecaretips.org.

Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact Editor@tcia.org. TCIA arborists, safety and business professionals are also available as sources for tree related articles and issues: 1-800-733-2622 or andersen@tcia.org.