

Tree Pruning with a Purpose

Fall is a great time to be outside admiring the trees in our landscapes. We take stock of which trees are looking good and which seem to need a little help. If we discover trees that look like they've seen better days, we instantly want to solve the problem. It is natural to want to do something to help a plant – prune it, fertilize it, polish it – we can't help wanting to touch it in some way.

One basic housekeeping chore that might help a struggling tree would be pruning. Pruning is an oft-needed maintenance treatment for good tree health and safety, 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 the fall, limit the amount of live tissue being removed and focus mainly on removing dead or broken branches.

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 growing season. If the tree is of a species that cannot tolerate a lot of pruning, even less should be removed.

When determining how much pruning your tree can tolerate, a qualified 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

"All that said, fall is a good time to evaluate a tree to plan future pruning that may be needed to meet certain tree health goals," says Tchukki Andersen, BCMA, CTSP* and staff arborist with the Tree Care Industry Association.

A qualified 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 and direction of growth

- provide clearance for vehicles or roadways
- improve tree structure
- increase or improve aesthetics
- restore shape

"Once tree pruning objectives are established, the arborist can provide specific details on how your trees could be pruned to get the desired result," says Andersen.

The pruning process can be overwhelming to those not familiar with the pruning of shade and ornamental trees. A qualified tree care expert trained in tree and woody plant health care can answer your 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, the generally accepted industry standards for tree care practices.

Find a Professional

A professional arborist can assess your landscape and work with you to determine the best care for your trees. Contact the Tree Care Industry Association, a public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture since 1938. TCIA has more than 2,300 member tree care firms and affiliated companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA also 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. For more, visit www.tcia.org or www.treecaretips.org.

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.

*Board Certified Master Arborist, Certified Treecare Safety Professional