

# Pruning/Trimming Your Trees



MORGAN TREE SERVICE  
THE "VITACARE" COMPANY

## Tree Times

**F**irst, the short version (a convenient summary for people in a hurry):

- \* Trees have value and need periodic pruning about every 3-5 years.
- Lawn trees live in a very different environment than forest trees.
- Regular pruning and deadwooding prevents multiple and sometimes irreversible problems and value diminishment.
- Don't be entirely sold on the basis of the cost of the work alone.
- To help ensure knowledge and a quality result, look for company memberships and supervisor/worker certifications.
- Be sure that liability insurance and workers' compensation is in place.
- Don't allow workers to use climbing spurs.
- There are limits on percentage of foliage removal and *where* it should be taken out.
- Ensure properly finished pruning cuts: no stubs and no flush cuts.
- Curb stacking is not allowed.

**N**ow, for some detail: Large trees can be significant assets on a property. They can provide shade, cooling, quality-of-life aesthetic enhancement, and curb appeal. Healthy well cared for trees generally increase property values. But for those of us who have or have had responsibility for them, we've learned that periodic maintenance and care is also a necessity. When most people think of tree care, the first thing that generally and almost automatically comes to mind is . . . pruning. Of course trees in the forest usually don't get pruned and some would say that they seem to do just fine. In one way that's true because those forest trees usually enjoy the big advantage of a rich undis-

turbed forest floor of composting leaf litter and very little compaction traffic. They are not subjected to herbicides and seldom have to compete with grass and other understory plants. But even so, as individuals, those woodland trees don't always do as well as one might think. Decay, disease, deadwood accumulation, lightning/weather damage, and a mutual crowding that impedes structural development and functional health typically go unaddressed. So what we generally see when we do look is a forest that seems to remain stable as a unified whole while individual trees come and go on a regular basis. Here only the strongest survive to become the well-shaped forest giants.

**O**ur lawns and landscapes are very different in a number of ways. Usually there are far fewer trees that either by default or through planning become the focal point(s) in those landscapes. As a consequence, they naturally acquire a functional value by virtue of placement that is not possible for a forest tree. So then what about pruning?

**P**robably the most common large landscape tree in the mid-south is some variety of oak. But whether oak or some other, most landscape trees will benefit by a proper pruning every three to five years. Even in large canopied healthy trees interior deadwood accumulation resulting from lack of light is a natural thing. When deadwood is allowed to remain, it precipitates a continuing maintenance and aesthetics issue on the ground underneath. But more seriously, it permits the spread of decay and rot into the parent limbs and trunks of these trees. As some point the damage resulting from this neglect becomes progressively irreversible. Because the pruning of a large tree can be a labor intensive project, many people are keenly aware of the cost and the need to shop

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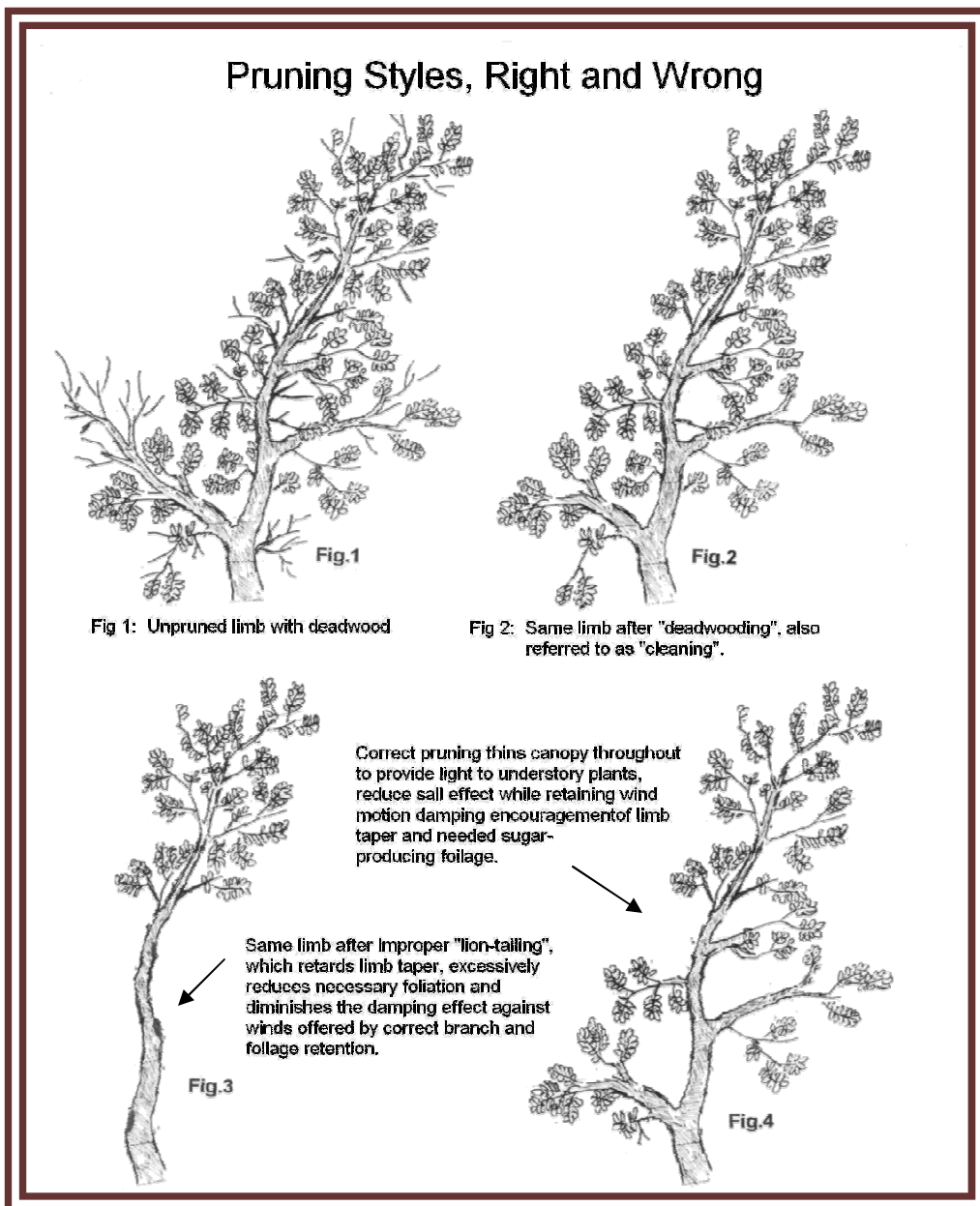
for the lowest price. But there are factors involved in an owner's return-on-investment other than just dollar cost. For example, does the selected contractor know how to prune the tree correctly? Do the climbers use spurs in their work on otherwise viable trees? The use of spurs for pruning work unnecessarily gouges and wounds the wood, scarring the tree and opening potential entry points for disease. Experienced climbers can get into and move around in any tree without them. Climbing spurs should only be used for removals and emergency rescue.

Beyond deadwood removal, do the workers know the limits on healthy tissue removal (*on average, about 25-30 percent in a healthy tree*) and how to take it out properly, avoiding the lion-tailing effect that is so commonly seen because it is simply easier and faster to do. Are the final pruning cuts properly made? This means removal of "stubs" but also avoiding "flush cuts" that unnecessarily enlarge the pruning wound, prolong healing, and open the tree to disease by cutting away a physiological barrier to decay. There is a natural swelling at the base of each branch that provides a mark for that final cut. This "swelling" is more prominent on some trees than on others.

Does the contractor carry liability insurance and workman's compensation on his employees? Is he able to provide proof of such by way of a current certificate sent directly from his insurance carrier? The property owner might request receipt of such a certificate via U.S. mail and there should be no charge.

Though it is not an ironclad guarantee, one way to gain some confidence regarding the training and professional standing of the company providing the work is evidence of membership in professional organizations such as TCIA or ISA. A quality company will also use on-site supervisors and/or workers that have earned the ISA Certified Arborist credential.

And stacking large amounts of brush and debris on the curb for the city to remove is a professional "No No" as well as a possible indicator of shortcuts taken in other areas.



# From My Journal:

## History Books and Old Photographs



Since grade school I have been an enthusiastic reader of world and U. S. history. For a long time it was the American Civil War that piqued my interest, but in my later adult years the stories of generations closer to my own seemed to emerge as more relevant. I began to see how the national trauma experienced corporately by all of our parents and grandparents during World War II actually did secure for us – for me and for you – the good things in this life that we enjoy today. So when Tom Brokaw, the TV news journalist, published his book “The Greatest Generation,” it resonated with stories that I already knew that came from family and friends that I knew personally. It was real.

And because I was once young myself, I am also aware of how younger folks, often the same ones who are not quite clear on the meaning of Memorial Day, also tend to view World War II as “ancient history.” But it’s not true that it’s ancient history; indeed it was almost just yesterday in the perspective of things. And the residual impacts on us are *still* profound.

Recently I came across a powerful book by Winston Groom entitled “1942, The Year That Tried Men’s Souls.” And if Tom Brokaw was in even a small degree correct in identifying my parents’ generation, the American adult generation of World

War II as “the greatest generation”, then it was that not-so-long-ago year 1942, just two years before my own birth, that proved to be the crucible within which our liberties and our way of life was secured.

In his book Groom begins by observing that an entire generation that is just now disappearing from our presence has routinely described almost every event and memory of their lives as having occurred either “before the war,” “during the war,” or “after the war.” And when they say that, they don’t mean the Viet Nam war or Iraq or the war on terror, even though the conduct of this last one also has its own ominously profound implications for us. For the generations that have followed I think it has been and is difficult, and in some cases impossible, to

fully appreciate the uniformly shared corporate impact of that experience on our seniors, and indeed on the entire country and the world.

So many wars have come and gone since, including that infamously long Viet Nam era, which I personally relate to in a special way. So then what is so unique about that other war? What was so unique about the one that our parents still refer to as “the war”? One big difference was the singular power and focus and impact it held over the daily lives of our parents and grandparents in a way that

later generations know nothing of, except for those among us who’ve since suffered horrendously personal impacts and losses. Subsequent wars have typically and sadly emerged as persistently partisan dramas that for most of us at least, are experienced only through news reports and tiresome irresolvable argument in the media, all without having any real impact on how we live. For most of us, again excepting those mentioned above, no discernable sacrifice is either required or experienced. The daily news is more like a TV drama or some irritatingly devious harangue in the far background of our routine and self-absorbed activities. Our lives go on as usual as though it were our right. But this was not the case at all for Brokaw’s “greatest generation.” Their lives were profoundly touched -- profoundly changed - by that great national struggle. They were keenly aware of it every day for three years or more. They sacrificed personally for it, for victory. And that victory was by no means certain in 1942. In fact, it was a dark year that was very scary in a way that we, as a nation, have not been scared since, even during the cold war.

So as I’ve been reading Groom’s book, I look back again at the old photo albums that I’ve inherited from my own parents. Now I imagine that I can see much more story there in those old yellowing black and white images than I imagined was there before. I can see much more humanity lurking there behind those eyes smiling at me across the years. And I am proud of them and feel a brand new gratitude toward them for what they did. And with this new war on terror now before us, maybe I could even learn something from them as well.





## Did You Know....

... that besides avoiding putting in new nursery trees in the middle of summer, the **very best** time to plant a new tree here in the mid-south is not in the springtime, as many believe, but in the mid-to-late fall, after the heat of Indian Summer days is over (thin-barked trees like Japanese maples and dogwoods may be an exception.) Because our winters are not particularly severe, the soil temperature usually stays above the critical point (40 degrees F.) that curtails root growth. This in turn means that the new transplant get four to five months to acclimatize in its new environment and begin new root expansion before sugar energy is needed for spring foliation and bud extension in the following growing season. Also, new trees may need supplemental water in the winter as well; the key factor is not temperature, but rainfall.

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... that when you plant a new tree in clay soil, the best shape for a planting hole is like a shallow extra-wide saucer, **not** a round pit with near-vertical sides. If the plant is a container plant or ball-and-burlap, be sure that about one-third to one-quarter of the root ball is planted **above** the original grade in clay soil. And don't worry too much about putting a lot of extra stuff in the planting hole. If you chop up the bottom of your "saucer" as well as the dirt from the hole, then return it around the transplant with about two inches of good mulch on top, that will serve you better since it minimizes the soil interface issue. More about this next time.

## Oak Gall and Fungicidal Applications

**Reminder # 1 (a repeat): Gouty oak gall**, the "big knots" on the twigs of large oak trees both debilitates and disfigures these important trees. We can now effectively break this cycle with a soil drench insecticide applied in January. Put this on your list to call us to get on our treatment schedule. The product stays in the tissue of your tree and is effective for a full year. (see our newsletter of Winter '06 for more details).

**Reminder #2 : Fungal spots and leaf damage** on ornamentals and shrubbery is largely caused by the presence of particular inoculum combined with weather conditions in the early spring. A series of three fungicidal applications of annually alternating fungicides, combined with appropriate doses of an active insecticide, can dramatically improve (or prevent) this unsightly and damaging problem. Call our office (756-9893) for an on-site assessment.

