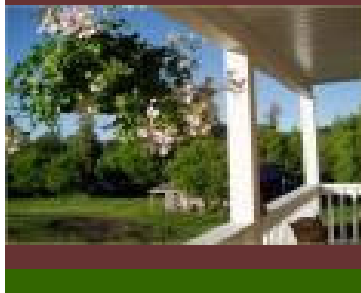


Pruning/Trimming Your Trees



MORGAN TREE SERVICE
THE "VITACARE" COMPANY

Tree Times

First, 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.

Now, 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 stabile 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.

Our 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?

Probably 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.

