

# Don't Top Trees!

There are many ways to prune a tree incorrectly, but the most harmful is known as “topping.” It consists of cutting back all the top and side branches of a tree to stubs, in an effort to make a smaller tree. Sometimes topping is done to prevent the tree interfering with utility wires, or overhanging a garden or driveway. In the process, much of the tree's canopy, the place it produces energy, is removed, and the tree sends out twigs from below each cut to try to make more leaves and branches to replace its loss. This is very stressful for the tree and makes the tree more vulnerable to insect and disease infestations. Furthermore, the new branches are not well anchored to the tree and are more likely to fall and cause damage to life and property.

Topping causes decay, because the tree isn't able to close off these types of wounds, especially so many of them. The decay organisms are given a free path to move down through the branches. The tree may even die from these infestations.

Topping is expensive, not only for the cost of the procedure, which has to be repeated every year or two to maintain the desired shape or size. If the weak new branches fall they can cause damage, and when the tree dies from the repeated stress, replacing it is expensive. It is also ugly. The most attractive shape for a tree is the one nature intended for it.

There are much less damaging methods of reshaping a tree whose branches are interfering with utility lines or some other obstacle. A qualified arborist can advise you on safer, healthier, and more attractive ways to have your trees pruned to accomplish what you have in mind.

For more information on pruning, see:

<https://www.montgomerynj.gov/bc-stc/page/tree-care-information>

For information on hiring an arborist:

<https://www.montgomerynj.gov/media/1271>

Or write to: [shadetree@montgomerynj.gov](mailto:shadetree@montgomerynj.gov)

*The Shade Tree Committee is charged with the planting, care and preservation of public trees on the Township's streets and in its Arboretum, parks and public areas, like the Otto Kaufman Center. It advises the Township on matters relating to tree policy, including review of development applications. The Committee provides on-going advice to Township residents and officials concerning the planting, care and preservation of shade and ornamental trees. The Committee collaborates with the Parks Department, Montgomery's schools, scouts, local businesses, and other Township committees on a variety of environmental and education projects, including its annual Arbor Day program for third graders.*