

A Case for Tree Topping

by Douglas DaBoone
Johnson

I read articles and bumper stickers that decry the ignorance of tree topping, and in many circumstances, tree topping is a bad idea; branches that fan out like a lion tail or witch's broom result from a major dissection (either topping or removing large limbs). This creates more work for future pruning and is deleterious to the health of the tree. That said...I believe it is tragic that a general consensus has formed that all tree topping is not an option, even when it will save a tree's life. The reality is that certain species do not lion-tail, and, if done correctly, topping will preserve a beautiful tree.

Healthy trees have value. They produce oxy-

gen and consume carbon dioxide. They provide shade and beautify property. While at a nursery on Long Island a few years ago a truck pulled in with a 48-foot redwood. I asked, "How much

"The reality is that certain species do not lion-tail, and, if done correctly, topping will preserve a beautiful tree."

for the tree?" The answer was: \$68,000 (and another \$31,000 for installation). In short, trees are a valuable asset, and unfortunately, many don't realize that in some circumstances, you can save a beautiful tree by cutting off its diseased top and limbs.

I live at 7000 feet and have been shown evergreen trees and aspen in my area that were selectively topped years ago. In every case, trees that had been dying from the top down, due to bugs, disease, or some other natural hardship, are now alive and flourishing while trees that were not topped are completely dead. I've applied topping techniques for decades and found, especially at high altitudes, with trees such as aspen and alpine fir, if the tree starts dying from the top down, a proper topping will be akin to removing cancer from a human body.

I have many happy customers who will attest that the trees they allowed me to top have survived and are healthy today. While some trees suffer greatly from tree topping, often, topping can save a valued, mature tree. It is a cost effective and environmentally conscientious solution to replacing a dead tree.

