

4. ECO-INFO - PRUNING TREES IN WYONG SHIRE

Edited July 2006

INTRODUCTION

This guideline outlines Council policy on pruning trees. The regulation concerning trees is found in Clause 28, Tree Management, in the Wyong Local Environmental Plan 1991.

Trees on private land throughout the shire may be pruned without the prior written **consent of Council** if pruning is carried out in accordance with the Australian Standard.

Pruning under the Standard avoids wounding trees by improper pruning. Incorrect pruning may increase hazards to persons or property and can be the starting point for wood decay or poorly attached regrowth branches.

AS 4373 - 1996 PRUNING AMENITY TREES

Anyone intending to prune a branch or a complete tree, is strongly advised to obtain and read a copy of the Pruning Standard from Standards Australia.



WHAT IS PRUNING ?

Pruning is the thoughtful and systematic removal of branches from a tree.

Modern pruning is not the same as the "pruning" practiced until a few years ago. It was once common practice to cut branches randomly leaving stubs to decay (lopping) or, to cut the whole tree canopy back (topping). Sometimes branches were cut *flush* to the trunk removing the important *branch collar* and destroying the shape of the tree. Tree loppers once routinely climbed healthy trees

using climbing spikes, leaving many wounds in their clients trees.

These practices are no longer acceptable and are not permitted.

Do not lop or top trees.

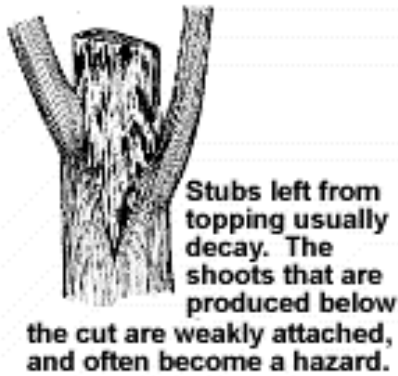
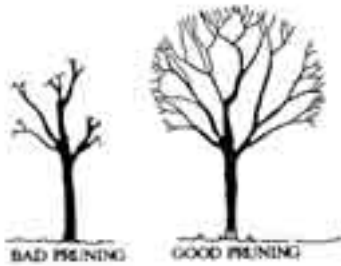
WHY PRUNE A TREE ?

- reduce risk by pruning out dead wood
- improve the health of trees by removing weak or diseased branches
- allow people and vehicles access under a tree
- reduce the effects of strong winds on trees
- increase light to lawns or gardens below trees
- remove an overhanging branch
- create safe clearances from wires and traffic
- develop a strong, balanced branch system in young trees

WHAT IS WRONG WITH TREE LOPPING AND TOPPING?

- Lopping destroys a tree's shape and *natural defence system* and creates hazards.
- Lopping increases the risk of wood decay.
- Lopped branches are never strongly attached when they regrow and often peel off from the tree and fall as a 'spear'.
- There have been many accidents caused by regrowth branches which fell from lopped trees.
- Lopping removes an excessive amount of leaf area in the canopy which can weaken the tree so seriously it may die.
- Lopping can lead to sunburn which may result in the death of branches or bark splitting and cankers.
- Lopping is expensive and a high maintenance practice. If the tree survives it will require cutting again within a few years.

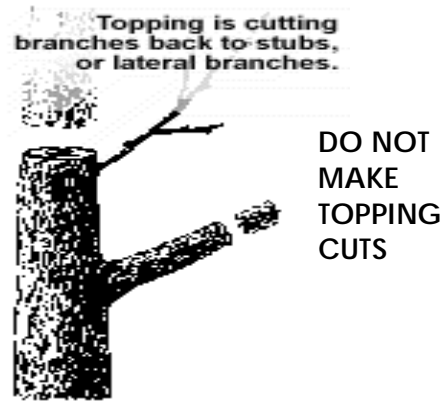
- Lopped/disfigured trees reduce property values as they are seen as an impending expense.
- Lopped trees are a potential liability since lopping is an unacceptable pruning practice and branch failure may lead to a finding of negligence in a court of law.



- Thinning opens up foliage, reduces weight on heavy limbs and reduces the “wind sail” effect in the canopy.

Lopping cuts (Topping or Heading):

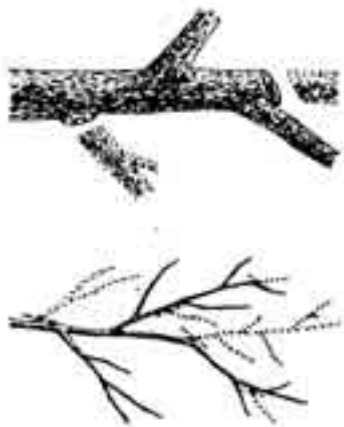
- Are used for hedging, and training very young trees but **should not be used in mature trees**, since it forces the growth of vigorous, weakly attached and upright sprouts originating just below the cut.
- Destroys the tree's natural form.
- Cause branch stubs to die back to the branch collar encouraging wood decay to become established or promote weakly attached regrowth branches.



TYPES OF PRUNING

Thinning Cuts

- Are the preferred method of pruning as it removes a branch at its point of origin either on the trunk or on the larger branch to which it is attached.

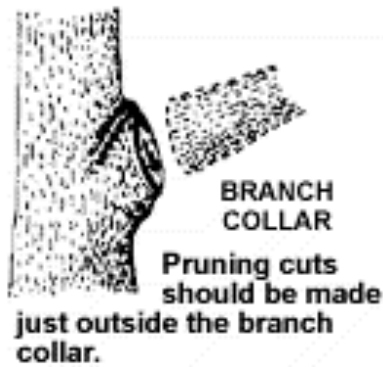


MAKING THE CUT

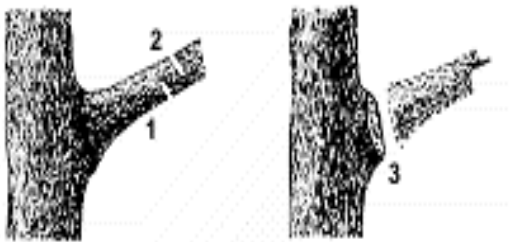
Before pruning always check to ensure there are no active bird nests or wildlife hollows. Ensure the work area and proposed work methods are SAFE (consider overhead power lines and restrict vehicles or persons entering the work area).

Live branches:

- Make the cut just outside the *branch bark ridge* and the *collar*.
- Do not *flush cut*, which is a cut made inside the branch bark ridge and the collar. **Flush cuts expose trunk tissues to decay and weaken the tree.**



- To avoid tearing the bark as the branch falls it is necessary to do a '3 cut' method (step cut) for branch removal.



Use the 3-cut method to remove a large limb.

Dead branches:

- The final cut should be made outside the branch bark ridge and the collar of live callus tissue. If the collar has extended only the dead stub should be removed; the live collar should remain intact.

Do not try to be neat by cutting the collar back flush to the trunk.



On a dead branch that has a collar of live wood, the final cut should be just beyond the outer edge of the collar.

PENALTIES FOR INCORRECT PRUNING

Incorrect pruning such as flush cutting, lopping, topping and spike assisted climbing, are unacceptable under the Australian Pruning Standard and therefore would be a

breach of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

Depending on the severity of the breach, penalties may range from a \$600.00 on the spot fine up to a fine of \$1,100,000.00 if found guilty of an offence through the court system. These fines may be in addition to the requirement for replacement plantings.

These provisions apply to tree professionals as well as lay people who attempt their own tree work.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO PRUNE?

Most trees can be safely pruned at any time for minor works, such as removing dead wood or very minor branches.

The best time to prune trees is during their dormant or resting stage, **generally winter**, where possible.

Avoid pruning in early spring when buds are swelling and just before dormancy, usually in the autumn. At these times trees may become stressed and open to disease.

WHO SHOULD DO THE PRUNING?

The Workcover Code of Practice (Catalogue 034) for the amenity tree industry applies to all persons undertaking tree work.

This code of practice is a practical guide to achieving minimum standards of health and safety as required by the Occupational Health & Safety Act 2000.

Human safety for yourself, members of your household and others should always be considered. Smaller branches can be cut from ground level by most people but it is not recommended that individuals climb trees and start cutting, especially if using a chain saw.

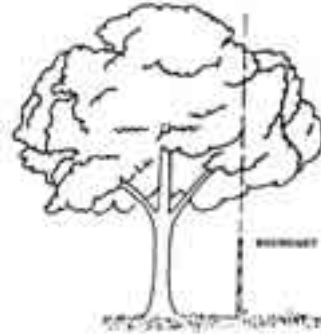
Most home insurance policies exempt claims for damages arising from trees being pruned or removed. Check your policy before you start and if you are not covered then seek the assistance of a tree professional.

This **simple checklist** will help you decide if you can do the work yourself. **Assistance from a tree professional should be sought when:**

- the branches you are to prune are **more than 150mm (6 in) in**

diameter, they will be heavy and you should seek professional assistance.

- ❑ you need to **climb a ladder** to get into the tree or you need to use a **chainsaw** above your chest height, - think safety and seek professional assistance.
- ❑ there are **live** electrical wires nearby that could in any way be contacted when pruning.
- ❑ the tree is old and looks to be in decline or structurally unsound.



CAUTION WITH LADDERS!

TREES ON ADJOINING LAND

It is only unlawful to permit a tree to overhang a common boundary when it causes a genuine nuisance to the adjoining land owner. It is advisable to first consult your neighbour and discuss your concerns before pruning.

The following diagram shows a common boundary situation in which you **cannot correctly prune** the overhanging branches unless you can enter the adjoining land. If you cut only on your side, as shown, you cannot prune to the branch collar or will remove excessive foliage which does not comply with the Standard.

Remember you cannot enter or cross your neighbours' land to prune their tree unless you have first obtained their permission. To enter without permission is trespassing.

If you prune your neighbours' tree it is your responsibility to dispose of the branches. You are not required to return the branches unless the owner wants them back.

If you are in dispute with your neighbour seek advice from a Community Justice Centre, Community Legal Centre or Chamber Magistrate.

- Hunter Community Justice Centre
Cnr Bolton and Church Street
Newcastle, NSW 2300
Phone: 1800 990 777 or 4929 1211
Facsimile: 4926 2420
- Central Coast Community Legal Centre
PO Box 246
WYONG 2259
Phone: 4353 4988
- Wyong Chamber Magistrate
Phone: 4350 3010

FURTHER ADVICE

- Ask about Council policies by contacting our **Customer Service** staff on 4350 5555.
- National Arborists Association of Australia
Phone: 4739 4339
- *Australian Standard, Pruning of Amenity Trees*, AS 4373 - 1996
Standards Australia Phone: 131 242
- *Code of Practice Amenity Tree Industry (Catalogue 034) August 1998*

WorkCover NSW Phone: 13 10 50

- *Copies of Australian Standard AS4373/96 and the WorkCover Code of Practice* are available at Council libraries.

Internet addresses:

International Society of Arboriculture
<http://www.isa-arbor.com/home.aspx>

International Society of Arboriculture
Australia Chapter
isaac.org.au

Arboriculture Association of UK
www.trees.org.uk

The **National Arborists Association** of
Australia
www.naaa.net.au

Publications:

Hadlington, P.W., & Johnston, J.A. 1977, *Australian Trees, a guide to their care and cure*, NSW University Press, Sydney.

Moore, G.M., 1990 *Tree Care for the Home Gardener*. Lothian Australian Garden Series. Lothian Publishing Co., Melbourne.

Harris, R.W., Clark J.R. & Matheny N.P. 1998 *Arboriculture: Care of Trees, Shrubs and Vines in the Landscape* (third edition). Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, USA.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Branch collar - trunk tissue that forms around the base of the branch between the main stem and the branch.

Branch bark ridge - raised or furrowed bark in the branch crotch that marks where the branch wood and trunk wood meet.

Callus tissue - living tissue formed around a wound just under the bark

Decay - degeneration of plant tissue, including wood, by pathogens and micro-organisms.

Flush cut - an incorrect cut that damages or removes the branch collar or branch bark ridge and damages stem tissue.

Lop - *incorrect* random cutting of branches or stems between the branch union or at internodes on young trees.

Top - incorrect cutting of the majority of a tree's canopy leaving a disfigured and damaged tree.

Spikes - climbing devices that are attached to tree climbers feet and which are used to gain quick access to a tree canopy.

Statutory Regulation - in regard to work near live power lines including insulated house wires. Regulation 133A of The Construction Safety Regulations governs engagement in certain activities near power lines.