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Nature's News & Notes

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"PROVIDING BEAUTIFUL, HEALTHY & BALANCED LANDSCAPES"



Dear Howard,

We wish you a Happy & Prosperous New Year. Our entire team looks forward to another year of working together to provide you with the most enjoyable landscape possible.

In this issue we will dispel some myths and misconceptions about tree care, discuss taking a Winter walk and more. Hopefully, you will find it enjoyable and educational. We do welcome any [comments or suggestions](#). What topics would you like to see?

The Myth of Tree Topping:

"It's like a haircut - sometimes it's necessary and a tree can always grow out of a bad one"



Topping is perhaps the most harmful tree pruning practice known. Yet, despite more than 25 years of literature and seminars explaining its harmful effects, topping remains a common practice.

Topping is the misguided process whereby a tree is cut back to a few large branches to reduce its height and overall size. Topping is an unacceptable practice to accomplish this; in fact, we refer to it as the "Texas chain saw massacre" or "arbor-cide". We often get calls from worried property owners that a tree has large branches overhanging their home. Not wanting to remove the entire tree they request that it be 'topped' to reduce the hazard of limbs breaking and falling onto the property.



Fact of Month: Did you know that...One tree is saved for every four foot stack of newspapers recycled.



January Tips:

What You Can Do:

- Look for any storm damage to trees and shrubs.
- Shake snow laden branches to prevent damage.
- When you are clearing your driveway with a snow blower this winter, direct the snow away from plants. Otherwise, the blowing ice crystals may damage the tender bark of young trees and shrubs.
- Remove heavy snow from evergreen branches to prevent breakage, especially Arborvitae and Hemlock. Try not to shovel heavy, wet snow onto plants. Keep salt applied to

There is no doubt within the scientific and arborist communities that topping will cause trees to become more hazardous over time, instead of less so. After topping, re-growth is vigorous, bushy and upright; many shoots arise and develop into weakly attached branches. These branches, and the multiple leaders, continue to develop girth and weight and have an increasing potential to fall and cause damage to people or property. Topping shortens the life of a tree & it's been demonstrated that sun damage, nutrient stress, insect attack, and decay results from this unnecessary and incorrect pruning procedure. Topping also seriously affects the tree's structure and appearance; the natural shape and structure of the tree is destroyed.

It is unnecessary to "top" a tree to lower its height, spread or reduce hazards. Thinning and reduction pruning are better means of reducing the size of a tree. Reduction when done properly consists of cutting back branches to a lateral branch at least one-third the diameter of the limb being removed and *large enough to outgrow lateral branches directly below*. The lateral branch becomes the source of new terminal growth and subsequently the tree maintains a natural form. In contrast to topping, thinning removes unwanted branches by cutting them back to their point of origin. Thinning conforms to the tree's natural branching habit and results in a more open tree, emphasizing the branches' internal structure. Thinning also strengthens the tree by forcing diameter growth of the remaining branches. Unfortunately, many tree cutters (certainly not certified arborists!) claim to thin to laterals when in reality they are topping the tree. Another way to reduce hazards from large limbs breaking is by using cabling to 'anchor' these large branches to the tree, this is a solution that can be used alone or in combination with pruning.

All of Ray Smith & Associates pruning strictly adheres to the "ANSI A300Part1-2001Pruning" rules; this is a standard developed by the Tree Care Industry Association of America (TCIA) detailing proper practices. Additionally, all our climbers have TCIA Certificates demonstrating their training & ability to safely work around power lines; all our work is supervised by one of our own Certified Arborists; and we are one of less than 200 companies nationwide that has earned the TCIA [Accredited Tree Care Company](#) designation for our ethics, quality and client confidence.

The Bottom Line

- Tree topping is never a justifiable pruning practice; it increases tree health problems and is aesthetically unappealing.
- A topped tree will require constant maintenance and has an increased potential to become Hazardous.
- Hazardous trees are a liability and ultimately the property owner may be held responsible for any damage hazard trees cause.
- Certified arborists and legitimate landscape professionals do not practice tree topping.
- There are acceptable pruning and cabling techniques designed to keep trees away from power lines and other structures.
- If problems caused by a tree cannot be solved through acceptable management practices, the tree should be removed and replaced with plant material more appropriate for the site.

walks and drive away from landscaping beds and grass.

What a Professional Should Do:

-Prune ornamental & shade trees because branch structure is visible and insects and diseases are inactive.

-Identify and prune structurally weak trees in order to avoid storm injury.

-Take care of any tree removals.

Removing trees while the ground is frozen minimizes the impact and potential damage to sensitive areas of lawns or gardens.

Plant of the Month-Ornamental Grasses



Think about planting some ornamental grasses this next spring to enjoy not only throughout the growing season but through winter as well. In addition to their color and texture, Ornamental grasses add two elements to the garden experience that are not readily obtained from many other plants: movement and sound. Ornamental grasses left un-sheared are a vital part of the winter landscape providing delicate texture and color against a stark white blanket of snow; add a significant vertical presence to the winter landscape and are commonly left standing until spring.

Consider all these benefits:

- Grasses are adaptable and can grow in poorer soils better than many other garden plants.
- Grasses require little effort to maintain.
- Grasses come in many heights, colors, textures and have varying water requirements.
- Grass seed heads and foliage add fall and winter interest.
- Dried grasses have many decorative uses indoors and out.
- Grasses can be used as groundcovers, specimen plants, for erosion control, and as vertical design elements.

A Winter's Stroll



Winter is a wonderful time for a stroll around your property. Do not let the cold weather and snowy days ruin your passion and enjoyment for your garden or landscape. The 'starkness' of the landscape when plants are dormant has a beauty all its own. An advantage of walking your yard in winter, as well as viewing it from your favorite vantage points in the home, is that you can uniquely visualize new options for next season's landscape. Consider a new habitat area for birds or butterflies with a pond or how about a sweeping island of colorful shrubs & perennials with ornamental grasses to add more interest to a large expanse of lawn. Shrub roses can add 'pizzazz' to a long hedge or wall and offer summertime color. Perhaps a wildflower meadow would be just the right element to add. Maybe a new patio will complete your enjoyment of the home. From some basic elements to new designs call us to get more ideas and sit down discuss those you already have.

Let Your Pond Get Some Rest



This is the month when your water garden is hibernating. Don't start any (noisy) work at your garden pond, which may disturb the rest of your pond's fish. Just make sure, that the ice on your pond always keeps an open hole for gas exchange and that pond aerators are working without malfunction. If you want to make changes at your garden pond in spring, now is the perfect time, to plan and design new installations in or around your water garden. Start

your research for pond renovations and additions, maybe a fountain or an additional pond stream and waterfall. Our water gardens designer has a myriad of materials and pictures of his designs from simple to grand that can be provided. It's a great time to look over your options around a warm fireplace or hot drink. Water features are available from large to small, from a simple, yet elegant water fountain or urn to an elaborate, naturalized pond.

Ask the Expert:

Should I Apply wound dressing after pruning to insure against insect or fungal invasion?



The best treatment of a pruning cut is not treatment at all. Many people expect to treat tree wounds just like they would treat cuts in the human body--with a dressing. Trees do not heal the way people do. When a tree is wounded, it must grow over and compartmentalize the wound. As a result, the wound is contained within the tree forever.

Wound dressing for pruning cuts have been shown not only to be unnecessary, but many actually inhibit callus growth over the cut, and they do not prevent decay organisms from moving in. Research has shown that dressings do not reduce decay or speed closure and rarely prevent insect or disease infestations. Tars, emulsions, asphalts and waxes can dry and crack, & when water gets behind the crack, decaying diseases are promoted rather than prevented.

The key to good wound closure is proper pruning. When done correctly, pruning cuts heal rapidly. The key is to cut the limb at the proper angle and proximity to the branch juncture. Pruning is a skill that involves both science and art, keeping a tree both healthy and beautiful. On your next outdoor walk look around at various trees and see how their wounds have healed (or not). Some of these wounds will have healed over or in process of; other areas may have decay set in. If you enjoy doing pruning on your small trees in the landscape now is an excellent time to buy yourself a how-to-book. We strongly suggest that you avoid any pruning that involves using a ladder or climbing into any tree (even a short fall can be serious) and leave that to the professionals. If you would like some guidance on pruning technique drop us an e-mail and certainly call us to speak with a Certified Arborist for some expert guidance. We would be pleased to speak with you whether you do the pruning yourself, have a gardener or caretaker, or would simply like our opinion without obligation. Send Your Questions or Comments To: [Ask the Expert](#)

RAY SMITH & ASSOCIATES, INC.

27 Henry Road, Unit 1

Southampton, NY 11968

631-287-6100

