

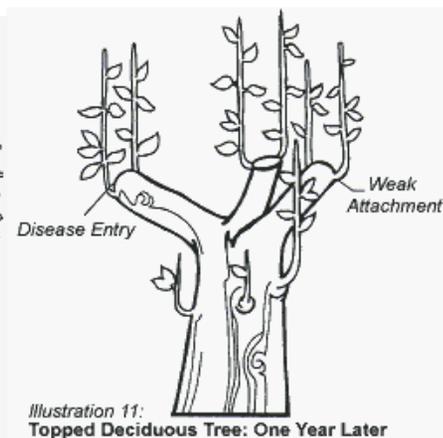
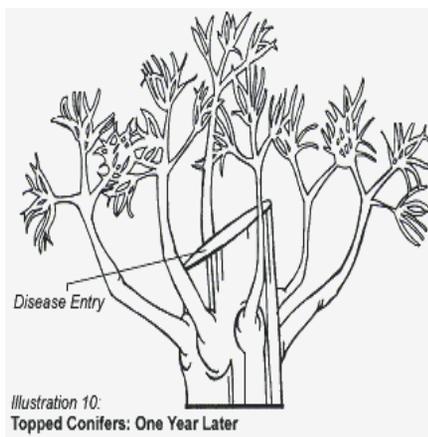
SPOTLIGHT ON... PRUNING FOR VIEWS

Pruning for Views

The most beautiful views in Washington State can be found on or near the Puget Sound shoreline. Magnificent vistas of water, beaches and mountains are enhanced by stunning sunrises and brilliant sunsets. Maintaining these views is the chief reason cited for cutting, topping and pruning trees on or near the shoreline. Some of these methods, however, may create bigger problems than they solve. This newsletter will address some of those problems, and alternatives to some of the more drastic measures taken by homeowners in order to maintain their views. It also discusses the danger of dumping tree limbs, other trimmings, and grass over the bluff or onto the beach, and alternative practices.

Why You Should Not “Top” Your Trees

One of the main reasons not to cut trees near a bluff property is that the trees help stabilize the bluffs. Trees hold large amounts of water that may otherwise flow down the face of the slope. Roots hold sand and soil in place. These both help minimize the effects of erosion and the potential for slides. Instead of cutting trees, property owners may look to the alternative of “topping” the trees, which can be accomplished by hiring anyone with a ladder and chainsaw. Unlike trained arborists, some who top trees have little knowledge or experience, and often cause significant damage. An increasing number of towns and cities across the United States are banning tree topping or are requiring permits to do so.



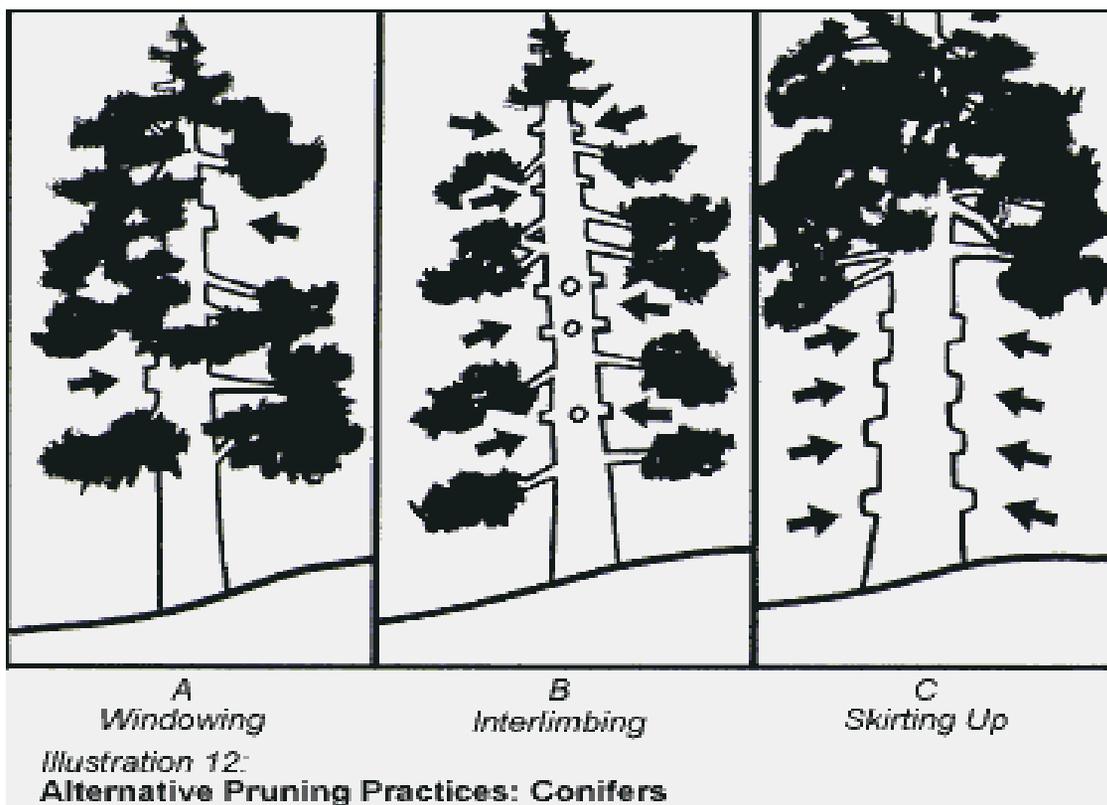
Illustrations to left and on next page are from Chapter 4, Vegetation Management: A Guide for Puget Sound Bluff Property Owners

Washington State Department of Ecology, 1993

Besides being ugly, a topped tree is stressed. Large wounds from improper pruning can expose heartwood and sapwood, which attracts insects and diseases. The leafy crown of a tree accounts for up to 30% of its energy production, and topping can starve the tree. Latent buds are activated as a defense mechanism,

and multiple shoots pop up as quickly as possible below each cut in an effort to regain the lost energy. The shoots can reach the previous height within two years, requiring continuous topping and associated dangers. Tree canopies serve to protect the underlying branches and trunk from sunburn, which can lead to bark splitting and cankers. Tree canopies also shade the ground below. When exposed to light, the ground and bluffs are now open to invasion by Himalayan blackberries, Scotch broom, English ivy, and other non-native species. These invaders crowd out native species, helping to destabilize the bluff.

Pruning Techniques for Enhancing Views



When it is absolutely necessary to prune a tree to preserve a view, there are a few alternatives available that are recommended that cause the least amount of harm to the tree. Branches should be removed back to the point of origin, cut back to a strong lateral that is sufficiently large to take over the terminal role, or cut back to the parent limb. This helps preserve the natural form of the tree, and the cut can safely heal over. Never leave a stub, as this invites disease. It is best to hire a professional arborist who has a trained crew with required safety equipment and liability insurance. Professional organizations include the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA), the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), and the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).

Pruning Conifers

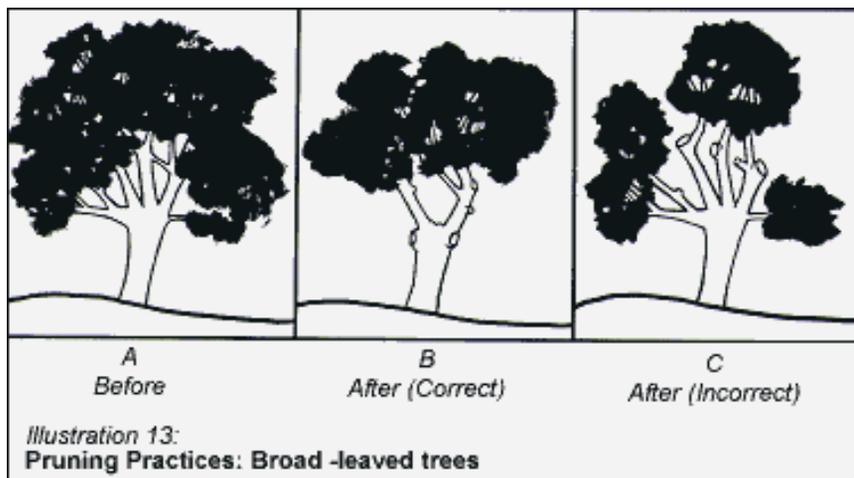
It is important when pruning a tree to retain at least 60% of its crown to keep it healthy. Some of the practices of pruning a tree, as seen in the diagram on the preceding page, include windowing, interlimbing, and skirting up. When tree limbs are cut to open a view, that view will always be preserved, as the limbs maintain the same distance from the ground as the tree grows. (When the tree increases in height, the growth is always at the top of the tree. The trunk may increase in girth, and the limbs may become thicker and longer, but they maintain the same height.)

Windowing involves removing sections that obscure a view. Major limbs or branches may be removed, creating a “window” through which one can again see their view. This can be seen in example “A” on the preceding page.

Interlimbing, as seen in example “B”, consists of removing whole branch whorls or individual branches throughout the canopy, thus allowing light to pass through. This may be done along with windowing to improve views.

Skirting-Up, in example C, involves limbing the tree from the bottom, leaving only the trunk to obscure your view rather than the lower branches. The lower branches do not contribute as many nutrients to the tree as the upper branches do, so more branches can be safely removed. If you look at a stand of conifers, you can see that they often lose their lower branches naturally as they grow.

Pruning Broad-Leaved Trees



Before you prune broad-leaf trees, you should first consider if they are worth the cost of pruning. Is a short-lived tree like alder or willow valuable enough to you to be worth the effort? Many would say no. A madrone, big-leaf maple or white oak, however, would probably be likely candidates to prune. Pruning of broad-leaf trees are more complicated, and there are several publications available in your local library that address the subject of proper pruning. Again, it is always advantageous to hire a professional, especially when working in tall trees or near the bluff. Most counties and municipalities restrict tree removal within a buffer zone, so you should always check local restrictions prior to removing what you might consider to be “weed” trees, as even those trees help prevent slides.

This “Spotlight On” publication was originally a Shore Stewards Newsletter compiled by Scott Chase, Island County, and published in April/May 2012



Shore Stewards is a program of Washington State University Extension. Extension programs and policies are consistent with federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, sex, religion, age, color, creed, national or ethnic origin; physical, mental or sensory disability; marital status, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era or disabled veteran. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.