



FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...

HAIRCUT FOR TREES

(Pruning)

By

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We all need a Haircut from time to time. This is also true for trees. Sometimes, they simply don't look as good as we know they can. A little trim or pruning in January or February might just be what is needed to improve the overall look and health of your trees.

Remember that trees are our largest asset in size and investment for any landscape. A beautiful tree can enhance a property and bad tree can devalue it.

Here are a few things to evaluate before pruning: 1) Is this a large mature tree too close to a structure? Or does it have plenty of room and just need some pruning care? 2) Is it a newly planted or smaller tree? This could be your opportunity to help shape and nurture a healthy tree in your landscape.

Why would a tree need a Haircut/Pruning? Dead or diseased branches, storm damage, crossed/rubbing branches, bad shape or poor structure are just a few reasons. A professional should be hired to do the work if you are not able or confident.

If proceeding on your own, gather the tools needed to do the job. Pruning shears, loppers, various saws, a sturdy ladder and strong ropes may be needed to do the job correctly. Make sure the tools are clean, sharp and well oiled. Use a bleach solution to disinfect cutting blades so diseases (such as oak wilt) are not spread from one tree to another.

Start by walking around the tree to check its structure and balance from all sides. Some trees and shrubs have crossing branches that rub against each other. These invite disease and insect damage. The branches should be

spaced so that air can flow easily through the tree. Pick two or three branches that need to be removed. Go slowly. It is VERY difficult to put a branch back on a tree.

When you have decided which branch to remove first, use the 3 cut method suggested by Texas A & M Horticulture. The first cut should be 6 to 12 inches up the underside of the branch from the trunk. The second cut should be three inches up the top side of the branch from the first undercut, and should cut all the way through till the branch falls away. The third cut should remove the stub back to the collar (where the limb came out of the trunk). Do not remove the collar. This method will allow the cut branch to separate cleanly from the tree without tearing the bark and inviting disease. Sealing the cut surface with pruning sealer is not required, but you may if you wish. Now the tree can heal itself by growing new bark over the remaining collar or ring.

Additional branches can be removed the same way. However, be sure to step back and look at the tree after each branch is removed. Remember that the best approach is an ongoing process, not a onetime chop job. Small branches less than one inch in diameter can be removed a few at a time to continually improve the tree.

Remember to prune oak trees only in the dead of winter in an effort to prevent Oak Wilt disease. For more information on tree pruning, the Texas A & M web site can be accessed at aggie-horticulture@tamu.edu In addition, Palo Pinto Master Gardeners always welcome questions at 940-659-1228.