

Tips

Tree Trimming

The Perfect Cut: Protect Tree Investments with Proper Pruning

Like Pebble Beach Golf Links with its wind and Muirfield Village GC with its narrow fairways, most golf courses can boast landscapes that provide golfers with specific challenges. But from coast to coast, one particular challenge is common to all courses — trees.

These living hazards can bedevil the game of even the best golfers. They add to the difficult play of a course, enticing golfers to try to beat the terrain. Trees are such an important part of courses that thousands of dollars are spent to install and maintain them.

“The best way for a superintendent to protect the hefty investment made in trees is to establish a routine maintenance program,” says Mark Jackson, golf account manager for The Davey Tree Expert Co. in Stow, Ohio. “In particular, pruning is essential to ensure the health and safety of trees. When done correctly, pruning can prevent accidents and prolong the life of your trees.”

Regular pruning is essential in maintaining tree health. It removes decaying branches, which are potential breeding sites for insects and disease. Pruning also helps prevent the spread of decay to healthy wood.

While preventing insect and disease infestations, pruning also helps ease the effects of harsh weather. Pruned trees allow heavy winds to blow through their canopies. By reducing wind resistance, pruning can stave off limb breaks, which can pose danger to courses and players.

Maintenance pruning of most shade trees can be done anytime. Severe pruning, however, should be done in late winter or early spring before

new growth begins. “Proper pruning can create good structural characteristics in a tree,” says Jackson, who served as a superintendent for 20 years before coming to Davey Tree.

Types of pruning

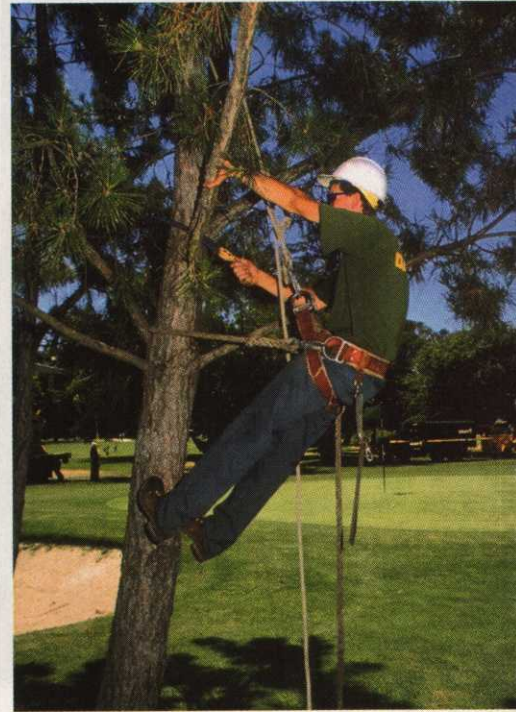
Proper pruning is also known as thinning, the method of removing branches at their point of attachment to the trunk or another branch of sufficient size. This eliminates unhealthy and unsightly stubs, resulting in an airy, natural appearance.

There are five general classes of pruning:

- **Aesthetic or fine pruning:** Undesirable branches that measure more than 1/2 inch in diameter are removed. This includes selective thinning to lessen wind resistance.
- **Maintenance or standard pruning:** Undesirable branches more than 1 inch in diameter are removed.
- **Hazard reduction pruning:** Recommended where safety considerations are paramount, this type calls for the removal of branches more than 2 inches in diameter.
- **Crown reduction pruning** (also known as natural or drop-crotch pruning): The height or the spread of the canopy is reduced to promote continued growth and health.
- **Crown raising:** Lower branches are removed in order to provide clearance.

Danger of topping

As much as trees are helped by pruning, they are equally hurt by the process known as topping, the indiscriminate removal of a tree's main branches. It is disfiguring and results in stubs.



Wounds caused by topping do not readily close and accelerate internal decay.

In addition, topping can starve a tree. By removing so much of the crown, an older tree's crown-to-root ratio is upset, which interferes with the plant's ability to manufacture sufficient food.

Topping is intended to control the height of the tree, but it has the opposite effect. The sprouts after topping are more numerous than natural new growth. In addition, they elongate so quickly that the tree returns to its original height in a short time. This creates a far more dense and dangerous crown.

“Trees are a necessary part of any course,” Jackson says. “Healthy trees translate into a healthy course, which appeals to everyone from golfers to superintendents.”

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