



Pacifica, Calif., provides a beautiful setting for Monterey cypress recently thinned and shaped.

Controversial Californian

Tree artist Ted Kipping combines an Oriental love for trees with European pruning techniques.

by Sandra Ladendorf

A young San Francisco tree surgeon says pruning is both art and science.

Unusual, maybe even controversial, describes Ted Kipping's approach to tree trimming.

For instance, he believes the best trimmers are also interested in art or music.

From a more practical standpoint, he says all deciduous trees and shrubs

should be pruned in full leaf.

"It's healthy for a tree to be pruned in a Japanese style, showing the skeleton and the bark of the tree," Kipping says. "The rhythms inherent in plant growth are as intricate and beautiful or as simple and stately as the most inspiring or primitively stimulating music."

Editor's note:

Ted Kipping, profiled in the article appearing on this and subsequent pages, has some unusual ideas about pruning trees. He has been successful using his own techniques, but readers should not get the impression that Kipping's techniques are applicable in other parts of the country.

California's climate is unlike that in other parts of this country, thus what is possible there is almost totally contrary to what is possible across the northern and central portions of the United States.

Also, Kipping's reasons for why his techniques are successful "are not technically correct," according to a horticulturist who reviewed the article. For instance, the Europeans are used as examples of people who use good pruning technique, but the climate there is nothing like the climate across most of this country. Dr. Alex Shigo of the USDA also has documented proof that early pruning can cause some problems in most parts of the U.S. Kipping's techniques have been very successful for him. They may be successful for you. But proof of their success across most of the country has not been documented.

Summer pruning

Experience shaped Kipping's theories. Each winter he found he was pruning suckers out of the same trees. He was trying to open the trees for good air circulation, to provide light for photosynthesis. But each summer suckers choked the same trees.

"People think that they can best tell what is going on (in their trees) during the winter," he says. "Not true!"



Niwaki trained Golden Arbor Vitae frame a San Francisco doorway.

Just as gardeners always overplant, we always underestimate foliar density when the trees are leafless."

Dense foliage on a tree may be attractive at first glance, but isn't healthy for the tree for several reasons:

- Opening the tree by selective pruning allows beneficial air circulation. Storm winds pass through the tree rather than being caught in the foliage like a sail, breaking limbs, perhaps even snapping off the tree top.

- Careful pruning allows more light to reach each leaf of the tree, which is vital to photosynthesis. "Seventy to 80 percent of the foliage on unpruned trees is redundant," Kipping says. "Any leaf not receiving light is not functioning."

- Physiological studies show that only the outer 25 percent of the leaves make sugars and that wood production doesn't fall off until 80 percent of the crown is removed.

While Kipping doesn't suggest removing 80 percent of a tree's crown, he encourages vigorous, thoughtful pruning to produce an attractive, healthy tree.

Kipping says there is nothing new about summer pruning of deciduous materials: Europeans have been doing it for years.

"I was blinded by what I'd been taught," he says. "There is a tremendous body of literature promoting dormant pruning. But if that is overlooked, considerable data supporting summer pruning pops up in French and English writings. That information has been poorly disseminated in

our country.

"In the United States a lot of pruning style has to do with climate and the social response to climate," he continues. "Much of the country has a winter lull. The ground is hard to plow. We get cabin fever. We pick a nice day and go out and prune. The irony is that we wind up generating unwanted wood."

Ecological corners

Unlike winter-pruned plants, summer-pruned trees and shrubs stay pruned unless they receive a heavy dose of nitrogen, he says.

"Lots of times, we forget that for centuries things were running along without us. We get into ecological corners," he says. "We assume that things are waiting for us to rectify them and the next thing we know, we create imbalances."

Kipping says there are checks already worked out in nature for all life. For trees, that means outgrowing damage from storms, insects, and competition.

Kipping equates man's winter pruning of deciduous plants with nature's natural winter pruning—storm damage.

With the top knocked out of a tree, a tremendous stimulation of dormant buds occurs, each wanting to become the new top.

"It looks like the tree had its toes in a socket," Kipping notes. "If we choose to winter prune we stimulate exactly the same rush of sucker growth."

"Without the influence of man, summer pruning is simply the milder threat of animal browsing—animals nibbling tender new growth as high as they can reach on the tree.

"It's the best start for a plant, someone munching on the foliage," Kipping says. "If the tips are pinched, floral growth is stimulated."

The four Ds

When working on a tree, Kipping applies his rule of "four Ds"—remove all damaged, diseased, dead, and deranged branches. By deranged, he means branches that criss-cross or shoot straight up, creating a framework that departs from the normal open pattern of healthy growth.

"I like to reduce the cantilever. It puts too much strain on the limb. It's foolish to have \$100 of wood holding up \$20 of fruit," Kipping says.

Thoughtful selection and planting of trees minimize pruning also. For example, don't plant standard apple trees—choose dwarf or semi-dwarf varieties, he stresses.

After removing the four Ds and

thinning for additional light and air circulation, Kipping suggests tipping of branches to encourage floral/fruit production for the coming year.

Kipping emphasizes the pruning of evergreens is a different matter. Summer pruning of evergreens favors pathogens. He prunes during the winter when no pitch oozes from the cuts.

"Summer pruning of evergreens is like blood in the water tempting a shark. Normally a tree releasing pitch would be badly wounded, exhaling solvents briefly. If enough insects are attracted to that wounded tree it be-

"There are lots of horticultural deaf mutes out there and lots of them have chain saws."

—Kipping

comes infested—doubly damaged while its defenses are down," he says.

Trainee traits

Over the years Kipping has trained other people to work with trees. He believes sensitivity to the rhythms of plant growth can be refined but not instilled.

"For example, a person who knows three languages picks up a fourth easily; a deaf mute has a tough time. There are lots of horticultural deaf mutes out there and lots of them have chain saws," he says.

Kipping's own poetry in action shows in the pruning of some large, Monterey cypress trees in San Francisco. He opened these trees. Homeowners now enjoy both the beauty of the trees and the cityscape beyond.

For the young tree trimmer, Kipping offers these tips:

- See the individual tree without looking at it only as an element of a crowd.

- Notice high mountain trees sculpted by the wind.

- Look at trees at sunset, in relief. See their skeletons.

In the Midwest Kipping might perhaps be labeled a flake. In California he's right at home.

His card reads: "Ted Kipping, Tree Shaper."

WT&T

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