

NATIONAL ARBORIST ASSOCIATION

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Don't Buy Into Tree Care Myths

AMHERST, NH--Even the most diligent tree owner can be fooled by the many misconceptions about trees and tree care - we will call them tree care myths - that abound.

"Even arborists - the professionals who care for trees - learn more about trees and how they work every day," says Peter Gerstenberger, director of safety and education with the National Arborist Association, based in Amherst, NH. "Some of the things we once believed about trees are proving to be inaccurate," adds Gerstenberger.

This ever-changing body of knowledge is just one reason that Gerstenberger advises owners of trees to consult an NAA-member arborist before undertaking any tree work. Gerstenberger lists below a few of the myths that plague trees, frustrate arborists and mislead tree owners. How many do you recognize?

Myth 1: Topping trees--lopping off large portions of a tree's crown--rejuvenates trees and makes them safer.
TRUTH: Topping trees actually places them under a great deal of stress. It accelerates decay and stimulates an abnormal flush of top growth. All of these factors make for a greater potential for failure. "If a tree is in low vigor and you top it, you're not solving the problem, you're just speeding up the tree's demise," says Gerstenberger. "Simply put, it is not uncommon for a low-vigor tree that's been topped to die."

Myth 2: Tree roots grow deep into the ground.
TRUTH: Trees' feeder roots typically grow just a few inches below the soil surface. "A tree's roots need to grow where they can absorb oxygen, nutrients and water. Roots grow out much more than down," Gerstenberger notes. Activities that disturb these feeder roots - such as digging, adding or removing soil, compacting soil with heavy equipment - can bring down even the mightiest of trees.

Myth 3: Trees "heal" themselves.
TRUTH: That hole left by the clothesline hook or cavity created by the broken branch isn't healing like a cut on your finger, it's being covered over, says Gerstenberger. "Trees do not regenerate tissue to fill in cuts and holes, they simply grow over the injury," Gerstenberger says. Because the effects of tree injury are cumulative, avoiding even small injuries and pruning the tree properly can dramatically prolong its life.

Myth 4: Trees grow without help in the forest, so they don't need help when they grow in our front yard.
TRUTH: If you really look, you'll see that forests are filled with trees in various stages of health and vigor. For the trees in our front yard, only good health and high vigor are acceptable. Yet the tree in our yard has many stresses and strains - air pollution, compaction of soil, construction injury, etc. - that you won't find in forests, and the tree needs assistance in coping, says Gerstenberger.

Myth 5: Painting a tree cut or wound protects it and helps it to close better and faster.
TRUTH: Painting a wound does not protect the injured area. In fact, painting can trap moisture in a wound, thus increasing the potential for decay. The best way to promote wound closure and reduce decay is to use proper pruning cuts and let the tree's natural defense systems go to work.

You can get a list of your closest NAA-member arborists mailed to you by calling the National Arborist Association, 1-800-733-2622, or by visiting the NAA's Web Site at <http://newwww.com/org/naz>. The NAA's e-mail address is 76142.453@Compuserve.com.