Hiring a Qualified Arborist

Pruning large trees can be **dangerous:**
If pruning involves working above the ground or using power equipment, you should hire a Qualified Arborist. An Arborist can determine what type of pruning is necessary to improve the health, appearance and safety of your trees.

When selecting an Arborist, please check that they have:

- Membership of a professional organisation, such as the Queensland Arboricultural Association (QAA).
- AQF Level 3 in Arboriculture (as specified in the Australian Standard referred to above).
- Proof of Public Liability Insurance (ensure that the policy is current).
- A list of references from previous clients (Don't be afraid to check).

You should avoid using the services of a tree company that:

- Advertise lopping as a service. A Qualified Arborist knows that lopping is harmful to trees and is *not* an acceptable practice.
- Use tree climbing spikes to climb trees that are being pruned. Climbing spikes damage trees and should only be used when a tree is to be removed.

For further information:

QUEENSLAND ARBORICULTURAL ASSOCIATION INC.

energex
positive energy

For further information on anything tree related, please contact the QAA office staff:

Ph: (07) 3821 1488 • Email: ~~tech@qaa.com.au~~ admin@qaa.net.au

Alternatively, please check out our website at: **www.qaa.net.au** where you will find heaps of information, as well as relevant links to other organisations.

The Cost of Lopping

Information for Tree Keepers

Lopping is not good for trees, neither is it good for tree keepers. Here is some simple information on what lopping is and why it is bad for trees and for the people who own or manage them.

What is lopping?

Lopping is the cutting of stems or branches to "stubs" or to lateral branches that are not large enough to assume the terminal role.

We hear regularly from concerned tree owners that their trees have been lopped, often after they were advised by a "tree lopper" that this would solve a perceived problem: maybe the owner was concerned that a tree had grown too tall to manage or that too many leaves were clogging up their gutters.

New shoots develop profusely below a topping cut.

The reality is that lopping ***creates*** many more problems than it solves:
Lopping often removes between 50-100% of the trees' canopy. As a trees' foliage is essential for food production, this kind of shock triggers new growth that is added to combat the massive amounts of stress that the tree suffers. This new growth is sometimes called epicormic or reaction growth.

The tree needs to produce a new crop of leaves as soon as possible in order to continue to produce enough food to survive.

If a tree does not have the stored energy reserves to do this, it may die.

Trees that are stressed are vulnerable to insect and disease infestations, while large, open pruning wounds expose the sapwood and heartwood to decay fungi.

Lopping may lead to decay

Leaving a stub maintains an open pathway to decay.

The preferred location to make a pruning cut is just beyond the branch collar at the branch's point of attachment. The tree is biologically equipped to occlude this kind of wound over time, provided the tree has sufficient vitality, and the wound is not too large.

A cut made midway along a branch or halfway up the tree stem creates "stubs" with wounds that the tree may not be able to close. Exposed heartwood may begin to decay. Few trees can successfully defend the multiple severe wounds caused by lopping.

Lopping creates hazards

Trees that have been topped may become hazardous and are unsightly.

The survival mechanism that causes a tree to produce epicormic shoots presents further problems. The shoots develop from buds near the *surface* of the old branches. Unlike normal branches that develop in a socket of overlapping wood tissues, the new shoots are anchored only in the *outermost layers* of the parent branches.

The new shoots grow very quickly, often as much as 3-4 metres in one year in some species. Unfortunately, the shoots are prone to failure especially during windy conditions.

Ironically, while the goal was to reduce the tree's height in order to make it safer, lopping has *severely increased* the risk of failure.

Lopping may lead to sunburn

Branches within a tree's crown produce thousands of leaves to absorb sunlight, when the leaves are removed, the remaining branches and trunk are suddenly exposed to high levels of light and heat, the result of which may be sunburn of the tissues beneath the bark. This can lead to the formation of cankers; bark splitting; branch failure and death of some branches.

Lopping makes beautiful trees ugly

The natural branching structure of a tree is a biological wonder. Lopping removes the ends of branches leaving ugly stubs. Lopping destroys the natural form of a tree.

Lopping is expensive

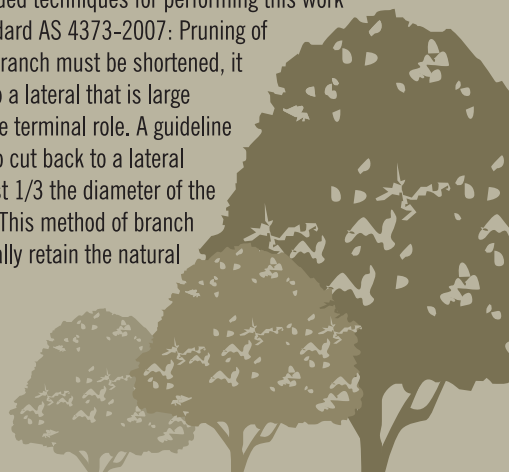
The cost of lopping a tree is not limited to the initial cost:

If the tree survives, it will require pruning again within a few years i.e. epicormic growth will need to be removed in order to reduce the risk of failure.

Another cost, not often perceived, is the reduction in property value. Healthy, well maintained trees can add 10-20% to the value of a property. Disfigured, lopped trees are considered an impending or ongoing expense.

Another unseen cost of lopped trees is the potential liability:
Lopped trees are prone to failure and can be hazardous: since lopping is considered to be an unacceptable pruning practice (see Australian Standard AS 4373-2007: Pruning of Amenity Trees), any damage caused by branch failure of a lopped tree *may* lead to a finding of negligence in a court of law.

Alternatives to lopping

Pruning or canopy reduction of a tree is sometimes unavoidable.

There are recommended techniques for performing this work (see Australian Standard AS 4373-2007: Pruning of Amenity Trees). If a branch must be shortened, it should be cut back to a lateral that is large enough to assume the terminal role. A guideline for this is generally to cut back to a lateral branch that is at least 1/3 the diameter of the limb being removed. This method of branch reduction should ideally retain the natural form of the tree.