

What is Lion's Tailing?

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Lion's tailing is the removal of an excessive number of inner lateral branches from a tree. This common but improper pruning practice strips out the interior branches, leaving limbs looking like lion's tails. Although the beautiful branch architecture is exposed, lion's tailing creates several health and safety problems.

Sunburn

One serious problem caused by lion's tailing is sunburn. Removal of interior branches removes necessary shade to the surface of larger parent branches. When sunlight burns the cambium just below the bark on these larger limbs, water and nutrient flow is restricted and foliage above the damaged areas dies. This loss of leaves allows even more sunlight to the interior, and a vicious cycle of sunburn and dieback begins.

Risk of Branch Breakage

Some people wrongly believe that over-thinning makes trees safer. But trees are often more hazardous because the force of the wind is captured in the heavy lion's tails, making branches more vulnerable to breakage.

Other Problems

Other problems caused by lion's tailing include:

- Reduced development of branch taper.
- Profuse re-growth of suckers and water sprouts.
- Insect problems like flat-headed borers that invade the heartwood of sunburned trees.

A Better Way

The ANSI A300 (Part 1) Pruning Standards describe lion's tailing as an unacceptable pruning practice. The A300 states that no more than 25% of foliage should be removed from a tree in a single year and 50% of the foliage should remain evenly distributed in the lower 66% of the canopy. Following these and the other ANSI tree care standards help assure healthier, safer and more beautiful trees.



Example of Lion Tailing