

# Tree Trimming or Pruning?

## What's the Difference and Why it Matters

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When people ask for help pruning their trees, many aren't sure what to ask for. Tree trimming or pruning? They know their trees need work but they don't know how to describe it. Tree service ads don't help. They use terms such as trimming, cutting, topping, rounding, crowning, heading, shearing, lacing, sculpting, wind-sailing and the list goes on. The words describe pruning operations but don't explain what will be done. They leave tree owners scratching their heads and often disappointed with the results.



Lion's Tailing – An Unacceptable Pruning Practice

To help clear up the confusion, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) developed a pruning standard called the ANSI A300. The A300, based on best management practices for tree health and safety, was created to help arborists write better pruning specifications so tree owners would know what work was being done.

The A300 recommends that proposals clearly state:

*Pruning objectives:* Such as structural improvement, size reduction, building clearance, etc.

*Pruning types to be used:* Such as crown cleaning, thinning, raising, reducing and restoring.

*Minimum and maximum branch diameter for cuts:* ½ inch, 2 inch, 6 inch, etc.

*Maximum % of foliage removed:* 5%, 10%, 25%, etc.

Tree pruning specifications are to an arborist what a set of blueprints is to a building contractor. They define the pruning outcomes that are planned and how they will be achieved. They tell what will and will not be done. They put the contractor, the tree owner and the crew all on the same page. And in the end, they clarify expectations and create a win-win for everyone.

When contracting for tree pruning services, request that your tree care provider define terms, establish clear objectives and describe the specific pruning types the workers will employ to achieve those objectives. If service providers have difficulty describing the scope of work and measurable outcomes, it may be an indication that they lack the knowledge and skill to prune trees correctly. And the last thing you want is for your trees to be damaged, sometimes beyond repair, by unacceptable pruning practices such as [topping](#) or lion's tailing.



Tree Topping – An Unacceptable Pruning Practice

For a better experience, consider selecting a qualified company that provides clear pruning specifications based on the ANSI A300. You'll be glad you did, and so will your trees!