

## Breaking Down Two Myths About Tree Topping

**Myth:** Topping invigorates a tree.

**Truth:** Topping immediately decreases the health of a tree and sends it on a downward spiral.

### Reasons:

1. **Decay** starts when a tree is topped. Even strongly angled cuts never close completely.
2. **Sunscald**, the effect of prolonged bright sun heating a tree's trunk after it has been topped, kills tissue just below the bark directly or when freezing temperatures follow, causing that portion of the trunk to die.
3. **Food production loss** from the absence of its crown greatly alters a tree's ability to channel nourishment to the woody parts—the stem and root system.
4. **Excess resprouting** occurs as the result of loss of branches, the tree forming very thick and ugly sprouting almost overnight.
5. **Disease and insect attack** follows on the heels of resprouting, sunscald and food production loss as a tree's physiological system is altered and disease resistance lowered.
6. **Root weakening** and decay result from the loss of food resources once produced in the part of the crown removed.
7. **Shortened life span or death** of a tree is the eventual result of topping. Some trees will not tolerate topping and may quickly die. All other survivors will have reduced life spans.

**Myth:** Topping reduces storm damage.

**Truth:** Topping increases storm damage potential.

### Reasons:

1. **Resprouting is quick.** Topped trees regain their original height within 2 to 4 years. Many trees wind up taller than if they had not been topped.
2. **Resprouts are weak.** No matter how native a tree is to the state, a topped tree's new limbs, because of their rapid growth rate, are weaker and will break easier.
3. **Resprouts are weakly attached.** Many topped trees will break right where the new limbs grow back.
4. **Dieback** is a term for entire limbs dying, creating hazardous storm situations.
5. **Resprouting is very dense**, especially in the first years after topping, making the tree less resistant to wind than had it been normally.
6. **Root death**, one of the results of topping, leaves an entire tree structurally weaker.
7. **Loss of side limbs**, due to topping, drastically reduces the "cushion" that normal trees have when they fall, dramatically increasing the chance of property damage.
8. **Liability concerns increase** for both property owner and tree topper if resulting trees cause bodily harm or damage property.