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ABSTRACT

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The practice of topping—also called heading, stubbing or dehorning—involves the drastic removal of large branches with little regard for location of the pruning cut. Professional arborists and other tree care practitioners now realize that the well-intentioned practice of topping can create a host of problems for trees and people who co-exist with them. Proper early training, selective branch thinning, or entire tree removal are more favorable alternatives. By removing a major portion of the tree canopy, the delicate balance between foliage and the rest of the tree is upset. These imbalances can lead directly to decline and death, or predispose trees to other problems, with death the inevitable result. Large branch stubs that result from topping are open invitations to insects and wood-rotting pathogens. Regrowth resulting from topping is also succulent and more susceptible to attack from insects and disease pathogens. Topping also disfigures the tree and ruins its aesthetic value in the landscape.