



Our business is people and their love for trees®

Pruning Trees to Give Direction

Many people believe that only mature trees need to be pruned. However, just like a young child, young trees need to be trained on how to “behave” or grow properly. If we do not train them, they often develop poor structures that can lead to limb breakage or even tree failure. A structural problem that can be easily fixed on a young tree may require radical, expensive, or damaging repairs later.

One pruning technique, called “subordination pruning”, involves selectively shortening or subordinating selected leaders and branches to encourage the growth of others. By doing this, we attempt to duplicate the way trees grow in the forest.

Forest trees grow close together. Young trees compete with each other for space and sunlight. The trees grow narrow and tall trying to rise above their neighbors to get the most sunlight. Growth tends to be focused in the central leaders and suppressed in side branches. This allows trees to focus growth upward, rather than outward.

In a landscape situation, we plant trees farther apart. In the absence of competition from nearby trees, urban trees have a tendency to grow wider than they do in the forest. Often, several branches from the same tree will compete with each other for vertical space. These competing branches often lead to trees with multiple leaders and poor structure.



By selecting the best leader and shortening competing leaders, the arborist can “train” the tree to grow in a manner that promotes a strong framework less likely to be damaged by storms or needing drastic structural correction later in life. Subordination pruning should begin about a year or two after planting and re-evaluated every few years.

A few minutes time selectively shortening and removing branches on young trees can prevent thousands of dollars worth of future damage. If you have young trees that can benefit from this type of pruning, call your certified arborist at The Care of Trees today to put your trees on a healthier path.



(left) Planned pruning eliminates branches that compete for space; (right) A crew member of The Care of Trees does routine pruning with a pole saw.

