

Saving Trees & Views

Communities throughout the nation are finding that tree lovers are increasingly at odds with view seekers. The most common compromise has been to top trees. This is unfortunate. Many people are realizing rather than saving the trees

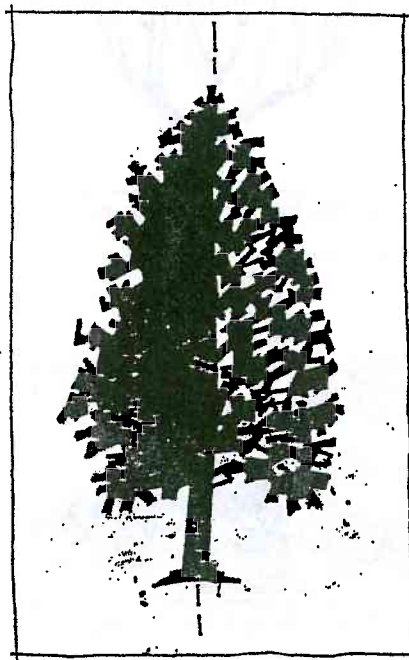
and views, topping eventually ruins both. In some cases neighbors and tree owners have found ways to make views and trees work together. Most of their solutions involved the pruning methods outlined below.

PRUNING FOR VIEWS

THINNING

Keep the structure but take out some of the foliage

Trees can be made more satisfactory as focal points by thinning the foliage evenly throughout the canopy. The actual amount of foliage that can successfully be removed varies depending on the species.



THINNING

If the arborist thins too much, water sprouts will return to ruin the view next year. Removing less than one quarter of the total

leaf area is recommended.

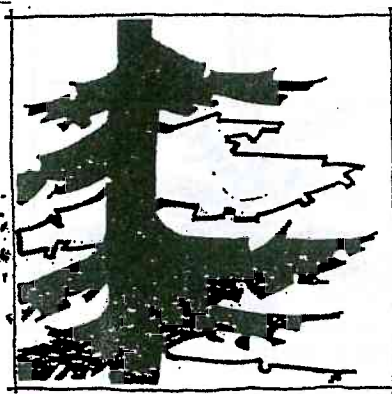
Properly thinned trees will retain their form and structure. Their natural beauty will be enhanced.

WINDOWING

Putting your eye to the keyhole

Windowing works best when the subject is a large, close-in tree that's blocking your view.

By carefully choosing what to cut, you can open a window in the tree that gives you a fully framed view of whatever lies beyond. Like most pruning, there's a certain amount of art involved in this.



WINDOWING

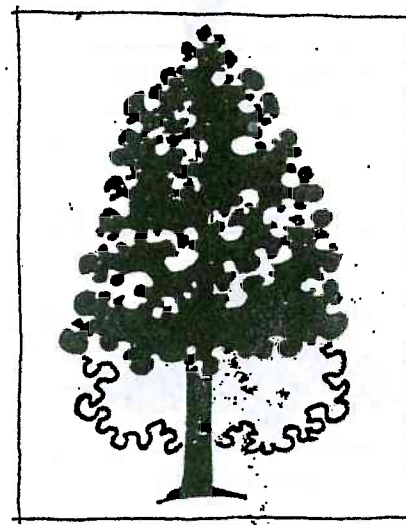
When you window a tree on one side, you may want to balance it with some pruning on the opposite side.

SKIRTING

You want a midi, not a mini

For mid-range trees, removing lower limbs is sometimes best. Depending upon your perspective, you may be able to open up a view by removing the lower limbs of a tree. This is called skirting or limbing up.

As a rule, don't limb up more than one third the tree's visible height (less if possible). Then, if the tree looks top-heavy, thin what remains.



SKIRTING

A tree should look like a tree, not like a flag or foliage on a pole.

WHY TOPPING ISN'T THE ANSWER

Like the difference between butchery and surgery, the distinction between good and bad pruning is largely one of finesse. Topping a mature tree is arboreal butchery, ranking even below tree removal as a view-enhancement procedure.

It's not a good short-term solution.
In place of a blocked view, you get an open view framed by the ghastly remnant of a once fully developed tree.

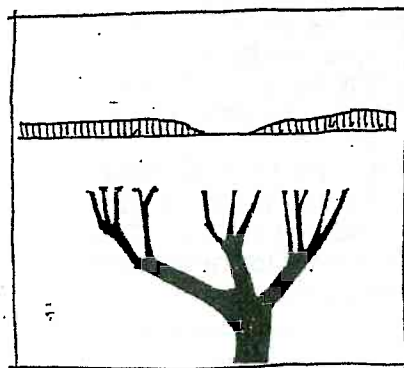
It's not a good long-term solution.
A dense mass of branches and shoots will replace each cut trunk, ultimately creating a broader, denser top than you had before.

Such a top can catch wind like a sail, increasing the risk that the tree will fall in a storm. It's true that some topped trees can ultimately recover their beauty, but by then the tree will block the view again.

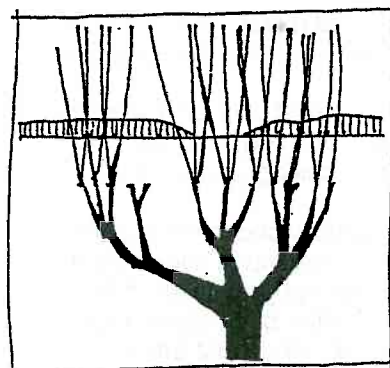
It creates dangerous trees.

Tree topping is a common cause of trees becoming hazardous. Trees so damaged are known to develop root rots, weak branch attachments, and rotten or hollow trunks.

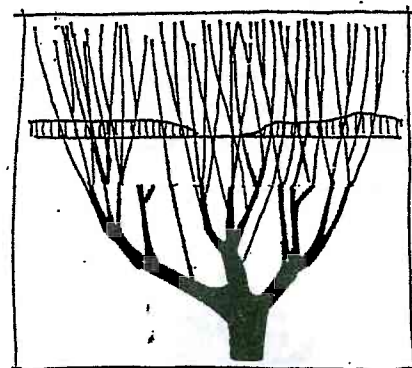
Like a ticking time bomb, the dangerous results of tree topping often take years to become manifest. Property owners have been sued for retaining previously topped trees whose falling limbs injure property or people.



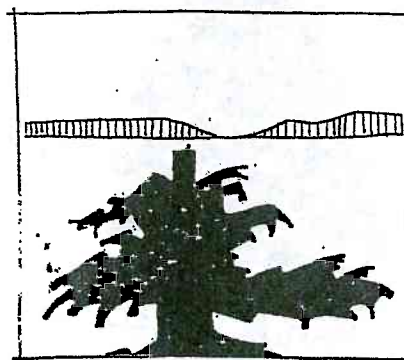
TOPPED DECIDUOUS TREE



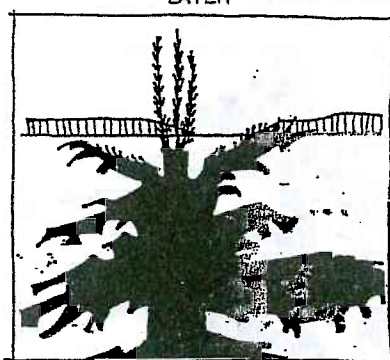
TOPPED DECIDUOUS TREE ONE YEAR LATER



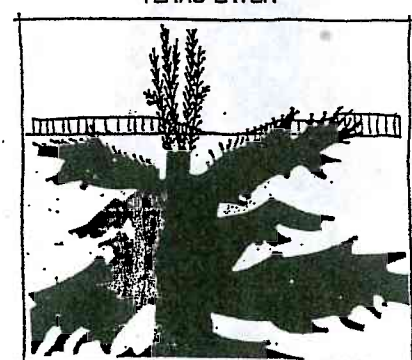
RE-TOPPED DECIDUOUS TREE THREE YEARS LATER



TOPPED CONIFER



TOPPED CONIFER THREE YEARS LATER



RE-TOPPED CONIFER TEN YEARS LATER

VIEW PREFERENCES

University studies on people's visual preferences have found that views of natural landscapes (woods, oceans, mountains) are almost always chosen over views of man-made settings (cityscapes). Furthermore, people prefer settings which

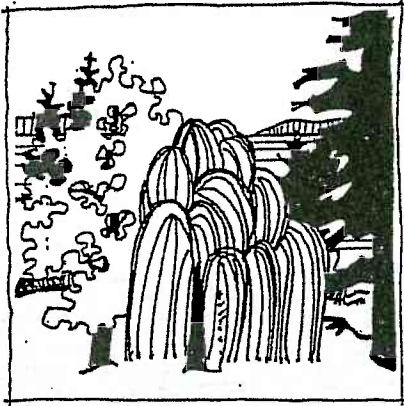
include trees as "near cover" with openings to a "distant vista". Any sort of water view, from a small courtyard fountain to a distant lake, is also highly rated. Unfortunately, one person's "near" cover can be another person's blocked

"distant vista". Using objective aesthetic criteria, trees which are often perceived as interfering in views may in fact add to them. Cumulative affects of tree removal for private views will in time degrade the overall view of the hillsides and communities.

SELECTIVE REMOVAL

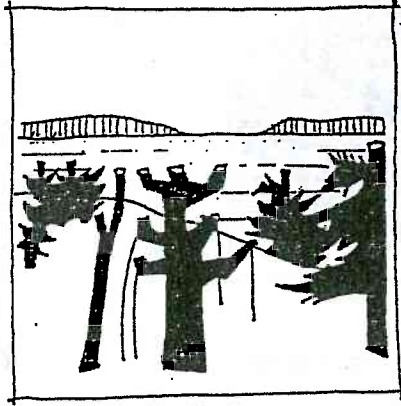
The point about all these pruning techniques is to make trees a part of the view. A view through trees, or between them, is almost always better than a view without them; near trees establish a perspective for distant vistas. Sometimes trees

interrupt key parts of the view. When that happens and pruning won't help, simply have the offending tree removed. It is best to leave trees on the edges of the view, however, directing your vision and framing the outlook.



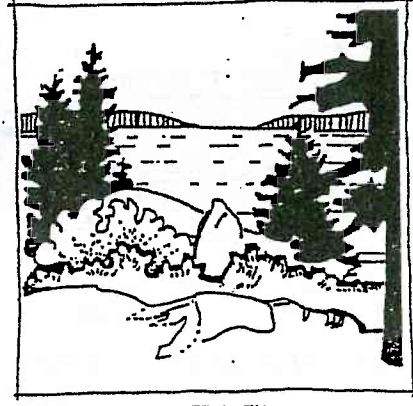
PREVIOUS VIEW

View blocked by trees.



TOPPED VIEW

Foreground is now centered on ghastly topped trees.



FRAMED VIEW

Remove two trees, window another tree to frame the view

THE BORROWED VIEW

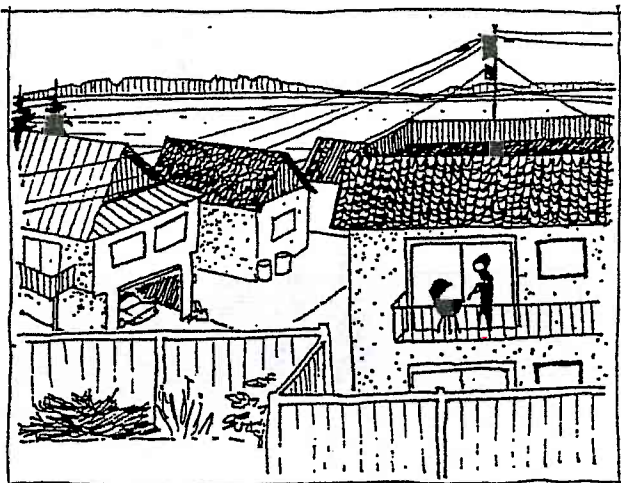
The term "borrowed landscape" refers to the technique of incorporating off-site visual elements into a landscape plan. A clever landscape designer uses those desirable elements -- neighboring woods, fields, distant vistas -- to give the sense that the garden is larger than it is.

Although most people own the trees planted for "near cover", they generally "borrow" the distant vista from one or more properties down the hill.

As developments continue to in-fill with higher densities and higher buildings, people's privacy is threatened.

Homeowners below feel as though they are in a fish bowl. Their solution, adding trees for privacy, often erases the distant view of the neighbor up the hill.

Careful selection by species and placement can balance the need for privacy with the desire for distant vistas.



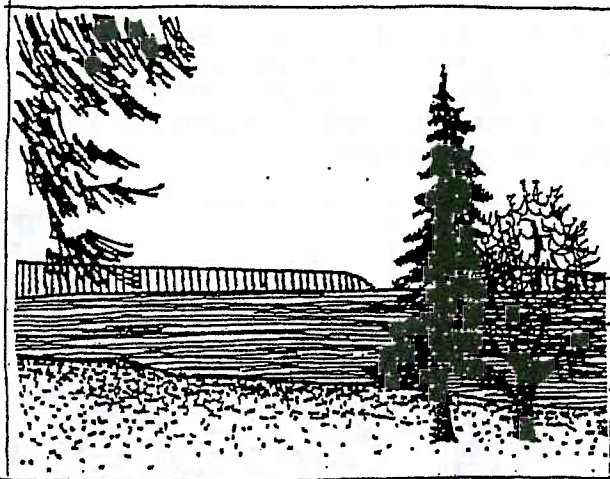
EYES MUST WORK TO EDIT ROOFTOPS AND POWER LINES FROM GLIMPSE OF WATER AND MOUNTAINS



TREES SCREEN ROOFTOPS, PROVIDE PRIVACY, AND IMPLY A MORE EXPANSIVE VIEW OF WATER AND MOUNTAINS

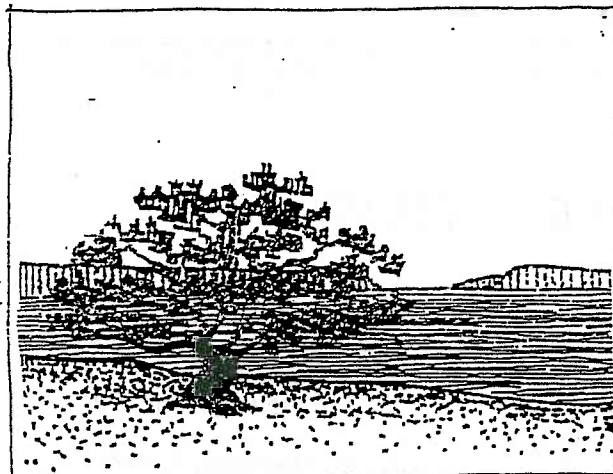
THE AEST

The following illustrations can be used to analyze the true aesthetic value of trees in a given situation.



FRAME

Tree limbs create a natural picture frame, focusing the view to the landscape beyond.



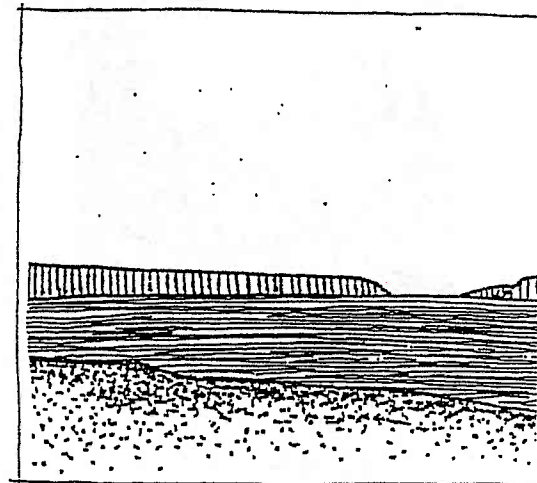
FOREGROUND

The structure of this tree adds visual interest to the view, and develops perspective.

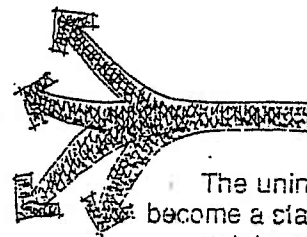


FILTER

Lacy leaves and intricate branch patterns entice you to see through and beyond.



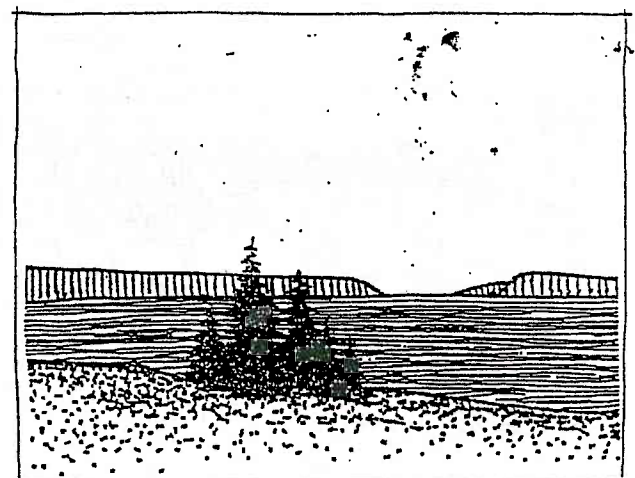
UNINTERRUPTED VIEW



WHAT YOU SEE

The uninterrupted or "sweeping view" has become a status symbol and now drives the estate market. Uninterrupted views are necessarily more expensive.

The tree which moves so far from the green thing which is the view.

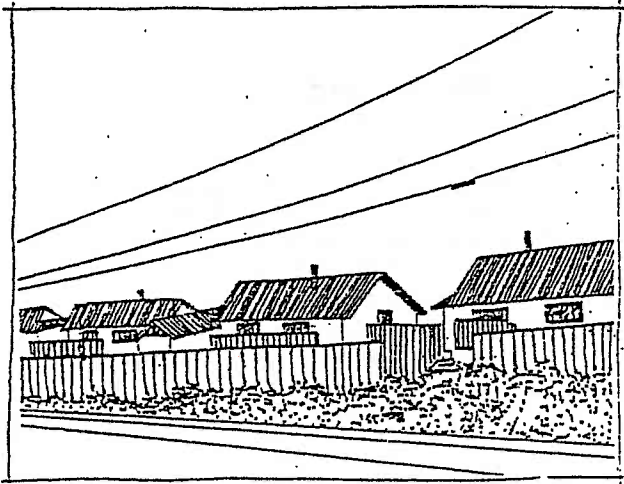


FOCAL POINT

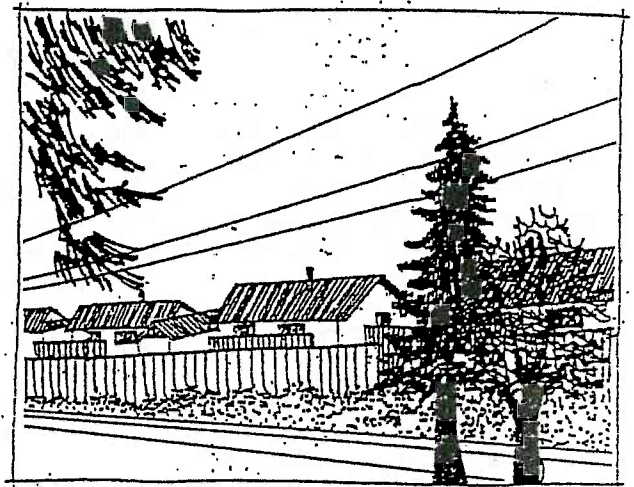
Conifers define distances, bring dimension to the landscape.

TICS OF VIEWS

What is a view improvement from one vantage point may degrade another person's view or privacy.

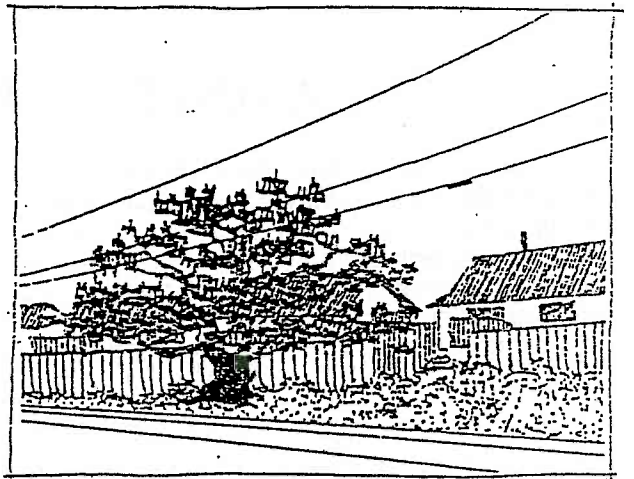


UNINTERRUPTED VIEW



FRAME

Trees select a view, and imply a more beautiful view exists just beyond the rooftops.



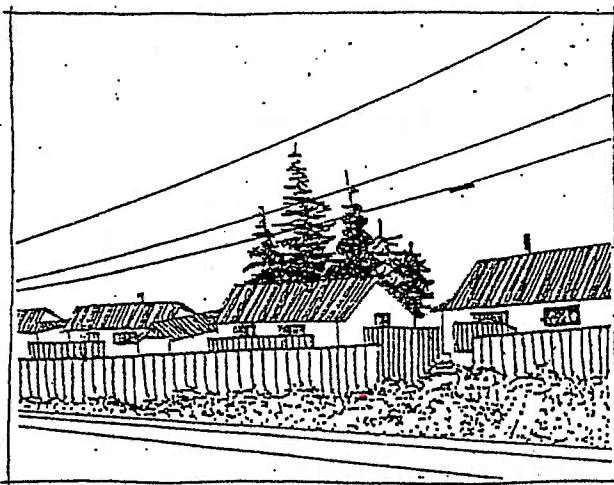
FOREGROUND

Street tree improves visual content. Remember, no large trees directly under wires.

WHAT THEY SEE

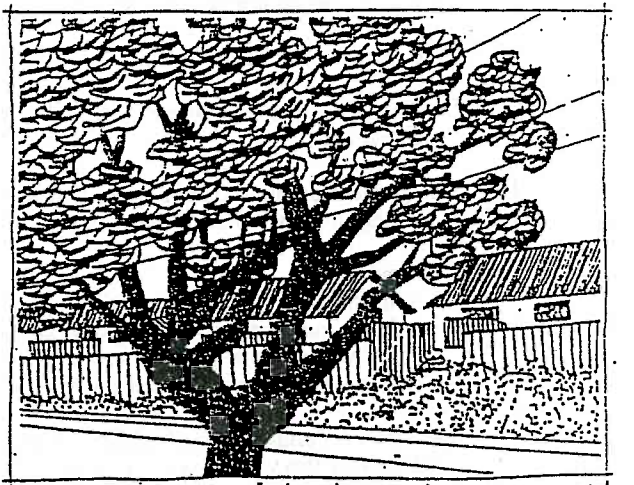
Every tree on a hillside will interfere with someone's "uninterrupted view". To remove all interfering trees leads to unappealing neighborhoods.

There is no joy in the eyes of others only a pain in the way. -- William Blake



FOCAL POINT

Trees above rooftops break up horizontal lines, vary the overall texture.



FILTER

Leaf and branch patterns introduce privacy and interest to the foreground view.

SEASONAL VIEWS

Deciduous trees are particularly valuable for view management because they offer two and sometimes three views while preserving the environmental benefits of trees.

SUMMER

Shade and clean air

Summer, when people are outside and active, is when they most need the shade and appreciate the privacy of trees. The trees' leaves work as "dust mops" cleaning particulate pollution from the air.

This prevents the build up of smog and haze that eliminates distant views on many summer days. The leaves shade and transpire water counteracting the urban "heat island effect" and reducing energy (air conditioning) demands.

WINTER

Picturesque structure

The barren tree in winter allows a view to the water or mountains beyond. The branches act as wind breaks and the branch pattern can give perspective to

the view. With the leaves gone, more light is allowed into windows, reducing heating costs.

SPRING and FALL

Transitional beauty

Calendar pictures often include trees turning colors in the fall or blossoming in the spring as foreground. The changing picture adds a seasonal dimension to views. On rainy or foggy days, sometimes only the trees are visible.

ABOUT VIEW COVENANTS

Until recently, people have dealt with view enhancement and preservation on a personal basis. View seekers often offer to pay for tree removal and replacement with a lower growing species. More recently communities have passed view covenants or ordinances. Although improving the views for many, there have been

unforeseen adverse repercussions: an increase in lawsuits and feuds between residents, an increase in the incidence of tree topping, property taxes increase, and the degradation of the landscape in general. In the future, covenants will most likely be written to minimize the ill-effects of such legislation.

A good neighborhood covenant or city ordinance should do the following:

Require that the view seeker attempt to resolve privately any conflict. And first contact with the tree owner includes information outlining rights and responsibilities of both parties.

Designate an arbitrator or board for dispute resolution.

Discourage lawsuits.

Disallow tree topping. All pruning to be done to International Society of Arboriculture standards.

Designate clearly who pays costs and fees. Often the view seeker pays a larger percentage for dispute resolution fees.

Set limits:

Limit tree size by choice of species not pruning.

Limit the number of trees one view seeker can petition for removal.

Limit the number and ultimate size of trees a homeowner can plant or maintain.

Limit the number of trees a homeowner must remove for view seekers.

Establish criteria for board consideration:

What was the view when the current owner took possession? Photos are often used.

What percentage of the view is obstructed? Are key elements hidden?

View is assessed from what vantage points -- the main viewing room only or from other windows?

What are the cumulative benefits of the trees -- ecological, assessed value, privacy, value to surrounding landscape and neighborhood?

WHO CAN HELP

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) has lists of ISA certified arborists and pruning standards to be used when collecting bids. Services of a qualified arborist can include pruning, hazard tree evaluation, determining the appraised value of a tree, determining the condition and age of trees, and crown restoration for previously mal-pruned trees. To contact the ISA:

ISA National
P.O. Box GG
Savoy, IL 61874
(217) 355-9411

ISA Pacific NW Chapter
P.O. Box 30713
Seattle, WA 98103
(206) 784-1945

PlantAmnesty is a non-profit corporation to promote better pruning and landscape maintenance. Write for information on tree care, pruning, topping and ordinances. Ask for order blanks.

PlantAmnesty:
906 NW 87th Street
Seattle, WA 98117
(206) 783-9813

The National Arbor Day Foundation has a series of informational bulletins on a wide variety of tree-related topics, including:

Stop Topping Trees
Pruning Small Trees
How to Select an Arborist
Tree Ordinances

Write or phone (ask for member services):

The National Arbor Day Foundation
100 Arbor Avenue
Nebraska City, NE 68410
(402) 474-5655

Also, contact your:

Local County Cooperative Extension Service
Local City Forester or City Arborist
Local Electrical Utility (*small tree booklets*)
State Urban Forestry Coordinator

REMEMBER: Never plant large trees under power lines!

In Washington State:
Department of Natural Resources
Tree Link Hotline:
1-800-523-8733
National Urban Tree Hotline:
1-800-368-5748

Portions of this brochure were re-printed with permission from the Sunset Magazine article "Saving Trees and Views", May 1989. Illustrations by L. Johnston Murosako.

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