

RESEARCH LABORATORY TECHNICAL REPORT



Vista Pruning And Other View Enhancement Techniques

E. Thomas Smiley, PhD, Urban Forestry

Trees contribute many benefits to a property including providing shade, reducing erosion, and maintaining privacy. However, with each year, trees become larger and may eventually obscure a desirable view. This is often a concern in resort and coastal areas where homes are built with a view of a mountain, pond, lake, bay or ocean. In these situations, view enhancement is a critical part of maintaining landscape trees. Having a view also increases the value of a property by 20 to 40 percent.

Views can be enhanced using various techniques including pruning branches that interfere with the view, selectively removing entire trees, or slowing the growth of trees before they can obscure the view. All of these techniques should only be conducted by a qualified arborist so as not to risk damage to valuable trees.

Pruning

As with most tree care practices, it is important to begin pruning early in the tree's life and repeat on a frequent basis. Pruning regularly reduces the impact on aesthetics and tree health. Removal of large branches may allow the entrance of wood decay fungi that shorten a tree's productive life while the removal of small branches will have minimal long-term impact on tree health.

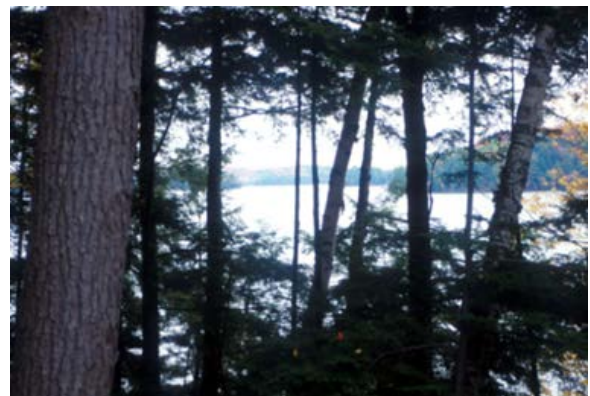
The American National Standard Institute (ANSI) has developed a standard for pruning trees. The ANSI A300 Pruning Standard defines appropriate pruning and how to make pruning cuts that are most beneficial for the tree. The removal of dead and dying branches is recommended for any trees where there are trails, cars, houses or other "targets" below the tree.

To achieve the desired view, the removal of live branches within the crown of the tree may be necessary. Branches selected for removal are those that interfere with the view. The number of branches to be removed depends on the desired effect. If a full

Figure 1: Full view vista pruning



Figure 2: Window view vista pruning



view is desired, the majority of offending branches are removed (Figure 1). This, of course, also allows a view back into the house. If more privacy is desirable, it is possible to remove fewer branches thus creating windows through the trees. The window type of vista pruning allows a specific view from a predetermined point(s) in the house (Figure 2). Since only a few branches are removed, it minimizes the view of the house thereby maintaining privacy.

On slopes, the best view may be over the tops of some trees. To reduce the height of trees, reduction pruning is employed. Reduction pruning consists of pruning back to a lateral branch large enough to assume apical dominance and support the growth of the stem or branch immediately below the cut. Reduction pruning is most suitable on small trees, preferably starting before they begin to obscure the view. Reduction pruning on larger trees can deform tree appearance and may adversely affect plant health. This type of pruning is not suitable for many conifer tree species.

When large trees must be reduced, jagged cuts may be preferred over smooth cuts. Jagged cuts actually increase the spread of decay in the tree, which is beneficial for wildlife, especially cavity-nesting birds. These cuts also produce a more natural appearance after they have weathered. Creating jagged cuts for wildlife trees should only be considered on low value trees in natural areas away from houses, structures or other high use areas.

In more level areas, or with large trees near the house, the removal of lower limbs that obscure the view may be necessary. As with reduction pruning, it is better for a tree's health to remove small branches rather than large limbs. This is done by starting earlier in the tree's life or by removing smaller branches further out on the limb which removes weight allowing the limb to "spring" upward.

These pruning types can be combined as needed to accomplish the desired effect. However, for mature trees it is best not to remove more than 25% of the live branches at one time.

Tree Removal

In some areas, there are simply too many tree trunks obscuring the view. If excessive trunks are the problem, it may be necessary to carefully select a number of trees for complete removal. When selecting trees for removal, location will be of prime importance. When possible, select the most desirable, healthiest and pest-resistant species for preservation. Dead trees and some live trees with defects in their structure are likely to fail, especially during storms. If there are likely to be people or other targets beneath these trees, they should be the first to be removed.

The removal of too many trees or even a single large tree may create an opening that will promote the growth of many seedlings and younger trees. Root systems may also be damaged by the increase in soil temperature exposed to full sun unless mulching or other management techniques are used. Vegetation management may need to be increased when openings are created.

Growth Regulators

Where it is desirable to reduce the height or development of new internal branches, the use of tree growth regulators (TGRs) should be considered. Growth regulators are materials that inhibit twig elongation. There are two types of TGRs available: soil applied and post-pruning treatment. Soil applied TGRs may take up to a full growing season for the effects to become apparent. After the initial application, a TGR will need to be reapplied every three to four years, sooner if growth rates approach pre-treatment lengths. Post-pruning TGRs are applied like paint to pruning cuts. They are effective for about three months. When applied prior to twig growth, they will reduce elongation by 50% or more.

