

# SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

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Island County, Washington

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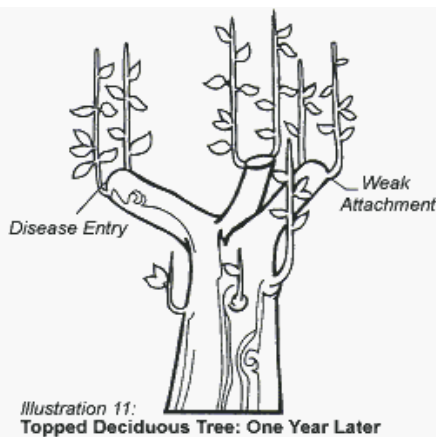
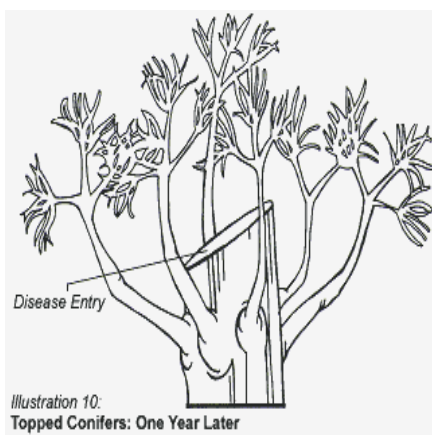
*This issue of Shore Stewards News was prepared by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator, Island County*

## Pruning for Views

The most beautiful views in Washington State can be found on or near the Puget Sound shoreline. Magnificent vistas of water, beaches and mountains are enhanced by stunning sunrises and brilliant sunsets. Maintaining these views is the chief reason cited for cutting, topping and pruning trees on or near the shoreline. Some of these methods, however, may create bigger problems than they solve. This newsletter will address some of those problems, and alternatives to some of the more drastic measures taken by homeowners in order to maintain their views. It also discusses the danger of dumping tree limbs, other trimmings, and grass over the bluff or onto the beach, and alternative practices.

## Why You Should Not “Top” Your Trees

One of the main reasons not to cut trees near a bluff property is that the trees help stabilize the bluffs. Trees hold large amounts of water that may otherwise flow down the face of the slope. Roots hold sand and soil in place. These both help minimize the effects of erosion and the potential for slides. Instead of cutting trees, property owners may look to the alternative of “topping” the trees, which can be accomplished by hiring anyone with a ladder and chainsaw. Unlike trained arborists, some who top trees have little knowledge or experience, and often cause significant damage. An increasing number of towns and cities across the United States are banning tree topping or are requiring permits to do so.

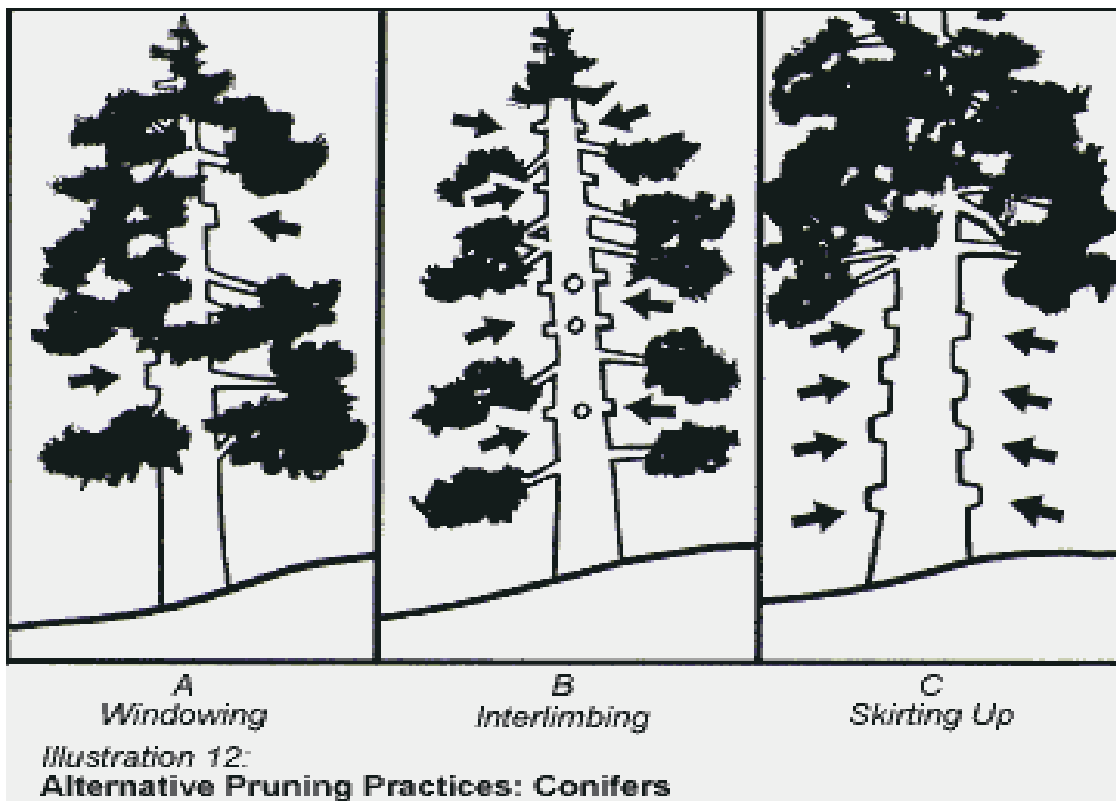


Illustrations to left and on next page are from Chapter 4, [Vegetation Management: A Guide for Puget Sound Bluff Property Owners](#)

Washington State Department of Ecology, 1993

Besides being ugly, a topped tree is stressed. Large wounds from improper pruning can expose heartwood and sapwood, which attracts insects and diseases. The leafy crown of a tree accounts for up to 30% of its energy production, and topping can starve the tree. Latent buds are activated as a defense mechanism, and multiple shoots pop up as quickly as possible below each cut in an effort to regain the lost energy. The shoots can reach the previous height within two years, requiring continuous topping and associated dangers. Tree canopies serve to protect the underlying branches and trunk from sunburn, which can lead to bark splitting and cankers. Tree canopies also shade the ground below. When exposed to light, the ground and bluffs are now open to invasion by Himalayan blackberries, Scotch broom, English ivy, and other non-native species. These invaders crowd out native species, helping to destabilize the bluff.

## Pruning Techniques for Enhancing Views



When it is absolutely necessary to prune a tree to preserve a view, there are a few alternatives available that are recommended that cause the least amount of harm to the tree. Branches should be removed back to the point of origin, cut back to a strong lateral that is sufficiently large to take over the terminal role, or cut back to the parent limb. This helps preserve the natural form of the tree, and the cut can safely heal over. Never leave a stub, as this invites disease. It is best to hire a professional arborist who has a trained crew with required safety equipment and liability insurance. Professional organizations include the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA), the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), and the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).

## Pruning Conifers

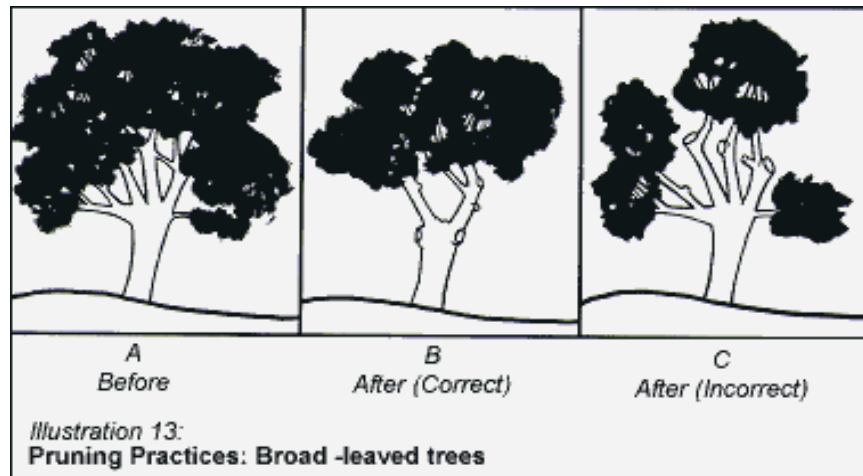
It is important when pruning a tree to retain at least 60% of its crown to keep it healthy. Some of the practices of pruning a tree, as seen in the diagram on the preceding page, include windowing, interlimbing, and skirting up. When tree limbs are cut to open a view, that view will always be preserved, as the limbs maintain the same distance from the ground as the tree grows. (When the tree increases in height, the growth is always at the top of the tree. The trunk may increase in girth, and the limbs may become thicker and longer, but they maintain the same height.)

**Windowing** involves removing sections that obscure a view. Major limbs or branches may be removed, creating a “window” through which one can again see their view. This can be seen in example “A” on the preceding page.

**Interlimbing**, as seen in example “B”, consists of removing whole branch whorls or individual branches throughout the canopy, thus allowing light to pass through. This may be done along with windowing to improve views.

**Skirting-Up**, in example C, involves limbing the tree from the bottom, leaving only the trunk to obscure your view rather than the lower branches. The lower branches do not contribute as many nutrients to the tree as the upper branches do, so more branches can be safely removed. If you look at a stand of conifers, you can see that they often lose their lower branches naturally as they grow.

## Pruning Broad-Leaved Trees



Before you prune broad-leaf trees, you should first consider if they are worth the cost of pruning. Is a short-lived tree like alder or willow valuable enough to you to be worth the effort? Many would say no. A madrone, big-leaf maple or white oak, however, would probably be likely candidates to prune. Pruning of broad-leaf trees are more complicated, and there are several publications available in your local library that address the subject of proper pruning. Again, it is always advantageous to hire a professional, especially when working in tall trees or near the bluff. Most counties and municipalities

restrict tree removal within a buffer zone, so you should always check local restrictions prior to removing what you might consider to be “weed” trees, as even those trees help prevent slides.

## Yard Waste Disposal

Maintaining our lawns and yards means that we have tree limbs, grass, weeds, and plant cuttings to handle. For those who live on bluff lots, the temptation is to throw yard debris and lawn clippings over the bluff. Or maybe you, or your landscaper, do so now. “Why not?” you may ask, “Grass composts quickly, right?” Besides being illegal, with a hefty fine for littering in many locations, there are many other reasons that you should not dump waste over the bluff.

If you use fertilizer or other chemicals on your lawn, those chemicals will make it to the shoreline along with your clippings, killing fragile marine life. Grass without chemicals can be dangerous, too, as the excess nitrogen can raise temperatures and pose a danger to marine life.

Grass clippings dumped over your bluff do not go away, but accumulate and create weight. These clippings do not decompose quickly, since low-oxygen (anaerobic) compost piles don’t work like those that are turned and watered frequently. This dumped waste can smother the sturdy native plants that help hold the bank in place, which in turn creates sloughing and potentially cause slides. Even modest amounts of waste on the slopes can create erosion.

What should you do with your lawn clippings and yard waste? One option is to replace your lawn with native plants. If that is not an option, you can take your lawn clippings to the county Solid Waste facility, and dispose of them there. You can create a compost pile, preferably away from the bluff, which could also supply you with clean compost for your garden. Or better yet, you could use a mulching lawn mower, which cuts the grass into fine pieces and leaves them on the lawn.

Another idea to protect your bluff and reduce lawn clippings is to install a 20 foot buffer of native plants between the bluff edge and the lawn or garden. Encourage low-growing natives that won’t block your view, and remove saplings and non-native “trash” plants like Scotch broom, English ivy, and Himalayan blackberries. This will now be a low-maintenance, water-free zone that you not only don’t have to mow, but will keep the weight from excess watering away from the bluff.

If you live along the beach on a low-bluff or no-bluff location, you should also avoid dumping your clippings onto the beach. The same chemical and nitrogen problems apply, and the grass clippings or waste can smother clam beds and other marine life. Another problem with dumping clippings onto the beach is that some forage fish lay their eggs on the beach at high tide. If you cover these eggs with grass clippings, it can kill them. Salmon feed on forage fish; marine mammals (and people) feed on salmon. You can see how seemingly harmless actions can affect the web of life.

If these options won't work, you can create your own compost pile, preferably away from the bluff, which would also supply you with compost for your garden or other yard plants. Alternatively, many counties now offer yard waste recycling for reasonable monthly fees. Check with your local Solid Waste facility to verify that you can deliver and dispose of your yard waste there, and if curbside green waste disposal options are available.



Photo by Joan Gerteis, 2006, Island County Beach Watcher

## Taking Care of Summer and Fall Yard Waste

In the past, one of the rites of summer and fall was to gather all the leaves, branches and downed limbs into a big pile and burn them. Some people still do this in areas where it's allowed, though in many locations this is no longer legal, and this option can be hazardous to your health and the environment. Each ton of vegetation that is burned emits 180 pounds of fine particles, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and volatile organic compounds into the air. This can be bothersome to some people, and can be physically debilitating to folks with respiratory ailments.

One option in disposing of a thin layer of leaves on your lawn is to mow them with your mulching mower, lowering your blade height to about 2". You may need to make a few passes to shred the leaves, and you may need to remove some of the leaf layer to avoid smothering the lawn, which can cause die-back and make the lawn more susceptible to diseases. A light amount of these shredded leaves will decompose, adding nutrients to your soil. Shredded leaves also make great mulch for use around shrubs and trees, or in your vegetable garden. The leaves will retard the growth of weeds, protect against winter freeze, maintain soil moisture, and will improve soil structure and add nutrients as they decompose. One way to create leaf mulch is to put the dry leaves through a chipper-shredder. (Wet leaves can clog the machine.) You can also "mow" a pile of raked leaves, but this works best if you have a grass catcher attachment to contain all the ground-up debris.



*Photos courtesy of Norm Kosky*

Another recommended option for disposing of leaves is to compost them, as they are a good addition to your compost pile. You do not need to shred them, but it may help speed up the rate of decomposition.



Since leaves are difficult to compost alone, you should add materials high in nitrogen, such as grass clippings.

If you have room to save some of your leaves, you can use these to mix along with your green materials next spring and summer. For more information on composting, there are many gardening books in the library that cover this subject. You can also find several links on composting on the WSU Waste Wise website:

<http://www.wastewise.wsu.edu/compost.html>



## Other Alternatives for Yard Waste Disposal



Not everyone has the ability or time to compost their leaves and other fall yard debris; for those people, there are other options available. If you have small branches to get rid of, you might think about renting, borrowing, or buying a chipper-shredder, which you can use to produce valuable mulch for your plants, trees and shrubs. You can also leave branches in a loose pile to provide habitat for birds and other wildlife; see how at <http://www.birdwatching.com/tips/brushpile.html> (Photo of wildlife habitat brush pile in U.K. at left; you can also do this with your branches and limbs.)

## Yard Waste Disposal at Transfer Stations and Other Facilities

### Camano:

You have two choices: you can take your yard waste to the Transfer Station on Camano, or haul it to Lenz Enterprises in Stanwood. The current cost of dropping off your yard waste at the transfer station can be seen at <http://www.islandcounty.net/publicworks/Documents/CAHandout.pdf>

The yard waste must be “clean”, meaning it can’t include plastic plant pots, wire fencing, plastic bags, rocks, etc. – only what you had growing in your yard. Branches and other debris should be under 6 feet in length and 6” in diameter, which means you should not be bringing in logs, stumps, and other large woody debris.

Remember to 'cover your load' to avoid the Uncovered Load Fees charged at transfer stations. The yard waste is taken to Lenz Enterprises, where it is turned into compost. Camano residents can also haul it directly to Lenz Enterprises on their way to I-5; Lenz is located at 5210 SR 532; their fees are posted on their website, <http://www.lenz-enterprises.com/index.php>



*Photo of Camano Transfer Station,  
Courtesy of Judy Chapman*

## **Whidbey:**

One alternative is to drop off your yard waste at Island County's transfer station on SR 20 south of Coupeville. The cost is same as on Camano. The yard waste must be "clean", meaning it can't include plastic plant pots, wire fencing, plastic bags, rocks, etc. – only what you had growing in your yard. Remember to 'cover your load' to avoid the Uncovered Load Fees charged at transfer stations.

If you live in the City of Oak Harbor, you can have a 95 gallon yard waste roll cart delivered by contacting the city utilities office at 279-4530. They can give you information on rates, pickup dates, and other disposal options. Another option in Oak Harbor (but available to everyone) is to take your green waste to Maillaird's Landing Nursery. They accept clean brush and grass clippings (no dirt, rocks, etc.) at \$10 per cubic yard, with no size limit. Call 679-8544 for details and hours.



*Coupeville Transfer Station Photo Courtesy of Janet Hall*

Langley has a program for recycling yard waste as well. Call the city for details at 221-4246.

## **Bibliography**

1. Vegetation Management: A Guide for Puget Sound Bluff Property Owners. Chapter 4. Washington State Department of Ecology, Shorelands & Coastal Zone Management Program, Publication 93-31. Prepared by Elliott Menashe, Greenbelt Consulting. (Much of the material on this subject used in the Shore Stewards book and in this newsletter was from Chapter 4 of this publication, which can be seen online at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/9331.pdf> If you cannot open this link, try to cut and paste it into the address line of your browser. )

2. International Society of Arboriculture website:  
<http://www.treesaregood.com/>

3. Urban Tree Foundation website:  
<http://www.urbantree.org/topping.asp>

4. A Guide to Successful Pruning: Stop Topping Trees!  
Authors: Susan C. French, Extension Technician and Bonnie Lee Appleton, Extension Horticulturist, Virginia Tech. Publication Number 430-458, posted April 1999, Virginia Cooperative Extension.  
<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/nursery/430-458/430-458.html>

5. Plant Amnesty website:  
<http://www.plantamnesty.org/stoptopping/5reasonstostoptopping.htm>

6. Cass Turnbull's Guide to Pruning – What, When, Where and How to Prune for a Beautiful Garden; Turnbull, Cass; Sasquatch Books. 2004. 240 pages. (Good guide for Northwest gardens!)

6. Shore Stewards News: Material for this newsletter includes past newsletter content from the following editions: March and December 2005; January, April and October 2009. Contributors to those newsletters include Chrys Bertolotto, Beach Watchers and Shore Stewards Coordinator, Snohomish County, and Peg Tillery, Beach Watchers and Shore Stewards Coordinator, Kitsap County.

## Events

**Camano Island Plastic Plant Pot Exchange and “Free Market”!** Saturday, June 2, 10 am – Noon. Bring your used plastic plant pots, or pick up ones to use later! No charge — reasonably clean—No soil, plastic markers, or plant material in pots, please. **Free Market:** Bring your truck or trunk full of items you want to give away, leave when you are done, and take home what's left. OR pick up great items to use! No charge, no selling, no money exchanges hands. Sponsored by WSU Waste Wise, Island County  
Where: Island County Annex Parking Lot, south of the Health Clinic and tennis courts. Questions: Contact Scott Chase at (360) 387-3443, ext 258, or email at [schase@wsu.edu](mailto:schase@wsu.edu)

**Free Septic 101 Classes on Camano and Whidbey:** Do you know how your septic system works? This class will teach you the proper care and feeding of your septic system. Learn how you can save thousands of dollars by properly maintaining your septic system. Discover what not to put down the drain. And learn how you can obtain low interest loans for repairs. This informative class is the first of three steps in becoming certified to inspect your own system. Register online at [www.islandcountyeh.org/Page/118](http://www.islandcountyeh.org/Page/118), or call Island County Public Health at 629-4522 (local number) ext. 7350. The Camano class will be held May 19. On Whidbey, classes are July 18 and September 18, 2012.



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The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at <http://www.nwstraits.org/>*



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