



Plant trees, don't butcher them

by Marilyn Loser

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Please help us plant trees this Arbor Week. There are 3 opportunities: Thursday, May 1, 9 am and 4:30 pm at the Alamosa Cemetery, and Saturday, May 3, 9 am on the south side of the Sunset Park ball fields along 8th Street just east of Highway 285.

Tree Board members, the Parks and Recreation crew, Scouts, and citizen volunteers will celebrate Arbor Week by planting 17 trees. We'll be planting 17 Crabapple trees of four species at Sunset Park – the City crew already dug the holes. The Crabapples are partly financed through a Colorado Tree Coalition/Xcel Energy Vegetation Management grant. Also, we'll plant 10 deciduous, shade trees in the Alamosa Cemetery. Check out AlamosaTrees.net for images.

Bring your friends and family and a shovel, if you have one. We will have extra shovels on hand.

During early May, Alamosa is ablaze with the incredible smell and sight of blooming Crabapples. They're cold hardy and raise our spirits – a sure sign summer is on the way! Many new varieties have been introduced in recent years and Alamosa can be a Crabapple Showcase.

There are already a number of Malus 'Spring Snow' in town and we'll be planting more. It's an early bloomer featuring white flowers and no fruit. Malus 'Radiant', developed by the University of Minnesota, does well in the Rocky Mountain region, produces an abundance of bright pink flowers. Malus 'Thunderbird' features dark purple foliage and is not particular as to soil type or PH. Malus 'Indian Magic' is a late bloomer with foliage that turns orange in fall. All trees will have identifying signs so we can track their progress in Alamosa. Wire fencing will protect them from deer while they're young.

The ten shade trees for the cemetery will be of 5 species: Lanceleaf Cottonwood (*Populus acuminata*), Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), Sensation Boxelder (*Acer negundo* 'Sensation'), New Horizon Elm (*Ulmus* 'New Horizon Elm'), and New Horizon Elm (*Ulmus* 'New Horizon Elm'). All are cold hardy to -40 F (zone 3) or -30 F (zone 4).

As I've driven around the valley lately, I noticed quite a few trees that have been butchered. A good example is some of the old trees in the Manassa Park. Huge sections were hacked off without consideration for the health or beauty of the trees. Topless trees are more than just unattractive. The practices of topping and tipping trees are harmful!

Topping involves removing all parts of a tree above a certain height to reduce the tree's crown height. There is no consideration for its structure or health. Tipping is the cutting of lateral branches at right angles to the direction of growth to reduce crown width. According to the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), both of these practices harm trees. You should not use them.

These methods provide only a temporary and ineffective solution that actually makes a tree more hazardous in the long run. The ISA's "Trees are Good" website lists several destructive effects of topping and tipping (and proper pruning tips).

1. Starvation: Topping often removes 50 to 100 percent of the leaf-bearing crown, robbing the tree of food-creating leaves that produce energy for the tree. If a tree does not have enough stored energy, it will not be able to produce the chemicals required to defend the multiple wounds from disease or insect attack.
2. Creation of weak shoots: As a defense mechanism, a tree will quickly grow food-producing shoots that are weak and prone to breaking, resulting in a more hazardous tree.
3. Sunburn: The leaves within a tree's crown absorb sunlight. Without this protection, branches and trunks are exposed to high levels of light and heat, which can burn the tissues beneath the bark.
4. Higher maintenance costs: Trees that have been topped and tipped will need pruning more often, or may die and need to be removed. Topped trees are prone to breaking and can be hazardous. Because topping is considered an unacceptable pruning practice, any damage caused by branch failure of a topped tree may lead to a finding of negligence in a court of law.
5. Disfiguration: And of course, since topping removes the ends of branches, unsightly stubs often remain destroying the natural form of the tree. A topped tree can never fully regain its natural form.

"The planting of a tree, especially one of the long-living hardwood trees, is a gift which you can make to posterity at almost no cost and with almost no trouble, and if the tree takes root it will far outlive the visible effect of any of your other actions, good or evil." George Orwell