Spring weather entices people to be outside in their landscapes and gardens to take stock of which plants look good and which plants seem to need a little help. It is natural to want to “do” something to help a tree–prune it, fertilize it, polish it–people can’t help wanting to touch it in some way.

Pruning is an oft needed maintenance treatment for good tree health, and to keep a tree and yard safe and looking good, but pruning without a good reason is not good tree care practice.

Pruning just because a neighbor is doing it may not be beneficial for the tree, and could result in too much live tree tissue being removed. This can cause the tree to become stressed, and perhaps decline.

In fact, industry tree pruning standards (ANSI A300) say no more than 25 percent of a tree’s foliage should be removed in a single season, and if the tree cannot tolerate a lot of pruning, even less should be removed.

When determining how much pruning your tree can tolerate, an arborist may consider if the tree:

• is healthy
• is still growing rapidly or has matured and slowed its growth
• had its roots severed or damaged recently or in the past
suffers from disease
• is a species tolerant of heavy pruning

A good arborist will assist in setting up an objective for the pruning job (i.e., what accomplishment is desired). Pruning objectives usually include one or more of the following:

• reduce risk of damage to people or property
• manage tree health
• provide clearance for vehicles or roadways
• improve structure
• increase aesthetics
• restore shape

Once tree pruning objectives are established, the arborist can provide specific details on how to prune trees, without harming them, to get the desired result.

These questions can be overwhelming to those not familiar with pruning. A qualified tree care expert trained in tree and woody plant health care can answer these questions. Make sure to ask for tree pruning to be done according to ANSI A300 standards.

Find a Professional

A professional arborist can assess landscape and assist in determining whether trees would benefit from pruning.

Contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture since 1938. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance.

An easy way to find a tree care service provider call 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP Code search on www.treecaretips.org.