

## Proper Palm Pruning

We recently noted that some tree companies have been pruning palms during the dead of winter and thought we would share some of the current industry knowledge related to palm maintenance. According to regional experts on palm trees, virtually all of the treatments provided to palms should be conducted during warm weather. This includes planting, transplanting, fertilization and pruning. The primary reason for doing this type of work during the summer is the fact that palms are native to tropical and semi-tropical regions and they respond more favorably at this time. Although palms will acclimate to our colder climate it does not mean that they are actively growing between October and April. For this reason the expert advice is to refrain from pruning palms during cold weather.

To better understand this concept, it might help to explain how palms grow. Palm trees have one central growing point located at the very tip of the trunk. The immature or juvenile leaves are actually folded up within the trunk and as they develop, they emerge from the trunk tissue and begin to unfold. The older leaves or fronds function to protect these juvenile leaves. Prematurely pruning a palm will actually do two things: (1) it opens the canopy up to wind and cold, exposing the juvenile leaves to potential damage and (2) the removal of the older fronds drains valuable nutrients from the tree that would normally be transported to the juvenile leaves as they mature.

Occasionally you will see instances around town where palms have been overpruned. When nearly all of the fronds have been removed we refer to this practice as “pencil-pointing” as the tree trunk will begin to look as though it was placed in a pencil sharpener. The premature loss of the mature fronds causes poor trunk development and it becomes stunted. The constriction of the trunk will be permanent if the pruning is extreme.

For these reasons we strongly recommend the following:

- Ensure that your tree care professional is knowledgeable about palm tree biology and care
- Conduct all treatments on palm trees between the months of April and October
- Avoid over pruning palms of any type, retaining as much living foliage as possible
- Do not prune leaves beyond the 9 o’clock and 3 o’clock position on the canopy
- Fertilize palms one to three times per year depending on the species and the site
- Remove all flower and fruit stalks upon emergence to reduce the loss of manufactured energy

See attached photos of two styles of pruning.



Overpruned date palms



Properly pruned date palms