

AESTHETIC PRUNING

A Personal Journey of Art and Philosophy

Aesthetic pruning is a term coined by Dennis Makashima, founder of the Aesthetic Pruning Program at Merritt College in Oakland, California in 1993. This technique borrows concepts from bonsai pruning and applies it to larger scale trees in a garden setting. Trees and shrubs that respond best to this technique include, but are not limited to: Japanese Maples, Magnolias, Weeping Pines, Dogwoods, Rhododendrons and other plant material with interesting branch patterns under fifteen feet high.

Pruning as Art

New branches emerge on a tree in alternate, opposite or whorl patterns, forming right angles along the parent trunk. As they grow and mature, these branches twist and turn into meandering, dendritic patterns similar to that of a river delta or drainage basin.

Dahlia Elizabeth Wist

All trees grow into some variation of this pattern. From this perspective, trees are seen as living art forms of texture, color and light. Aesthetic pruning plays with light to cast moods of shadow and illumination throughout the tree, giving sneak peaks at a serpentine network within.

In addition to correcting structural problems and removing dead and diseased limbs, aesthetic pruning brings out the artistic design of the tree. Similar to the sculptor removing stone to reveal the masterpiece, aesthetic pruning clears away branches that hide the tree's unique structure, while preserving its health and vitality.



Weeping Japanese Maple Before



Weeping Japanese Maple After

Philosophy in Action

When I inspect a tree before pruning, I look at its story. Like us, trees have unhealed wounds. Congestion from crossing and crowded branches echoes our struggles with unresolved pasts. Upon seeing these guards, one might step back and give the tree a quick cut around the outside of its canopy and move on. This is where I go deeper. Where I look for the whole story.

As I study a tree's core structure, I see its curves and twists, as a signature of a unique life well lived, longing to have its story told. Similar to a human's life, our underside, or past, doesn't have to be scary, once pruned by insight and wisdom. So I ask myself as I finish these "clients", "Who is healing who?"

Dahlia is a certified arborist, aesthetic pruner, garden designer and horticulturist. She offers site consultations, garden designs, pruning, lectures, classes and publications throughout New York's Finger Lakes and beyond. To hire Dahlia or learn more about her work, visit her website:



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