



Celebrating 21 Years!

ask the landscape professional
Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

EMAIL OR MAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:
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QUESTION THIS WEEK:

Hello Linda, My Rose of Sharon was beautiful but way out of control at 10' high. Two years ago it was pruned to 2.5 to 3 feet high. Now it looks ugly to me all winter. Does it look unnatural and weird to you? Should I just get used to it? How to re-prune it? Also, most of those large trunks have splits in them. Is that a problem? They do seem to be growing plenty of branches. Thank you. Cynthia

Linda's Answer:

Hi Cynthia,

I'm so sorry about your Rose of Sharon. It was pruned incorrectly. It was 'topped'. Tree topping is the practice of removing whole tops of trees or large branches and/or trunks from the tops of trees, leaving stubs or lateral branches that are too small to assume the role of a terminal leader. Over pruning reduces the foliage that's available for making food for the rest of the plant and can allow pests and diseases access to the tree, if cuts are made incorrectly. Plants may sprout excessively in response to so much canopy loss, both to protect the bark of the plant from sunscald and to increase food production. This is what is happening to your tree.



Your Rose of Sharon will never have true branches again that are properly attached to the trunk of the tree. The proper attachment of the branch to the trunk gives the branch its strength. The new growth is similar to suckers at the base of a tree. They are not securely connected and break off very easily. The sucker-like branches will not be able to hold the weight of the flowers, if it does flower. Unfortunately, these sucker branches are doing more to sap what little life there was left in the tree than to make it grow properly again. As for your particular tree sporting two different colors on either side, that means that two varieties were most likely grafted into one bush before you bought it; another sign it is unlikely to recover.

I suggest removing the tree and starting over with a new one.

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 22 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.

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