

Care of Storm Damaged Trees

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Recent storms have left some trees damaged and others that require com maintenance to survive. This column will provide guidelines on how to care for these trees.

Evaluation of the damage is the first step in care of trees after storm damage. Do not try to take care of tree limbs on or around power line. Large branches that are partially attached and overhanging buildings or areas humans use should be removed first. Clean up debris on the ground before tree repair starts so that personnel safety is increased. Look for hidden damage so that safety hazards are considered before repair work starts.

Remove damaged branches back to the first undamaged branch. Prune back to the branch collar; do not flush cut to the trunk or another branch. In addition, make a pruning cut that produces a smaller wound. When pruning lager branches, use a three-cut method to safely cut the branch. When using chainsaws, use all the proper safety equipment. There is no need to use tree wound dressings or some type of wound paint. These dressings can actually reduce the natural defense and repair methods of a tree. Wound paints may actually be food sources for microorganisms.

All trees that have had major structural damage will need to be removed. This damage does several things that reduce the viability of the tree. It can reduce leaf area needed for photosynthesis; provide entry points for disease and pests. Do not top trees to remove damage. A flush of branches will sprout creating a "witches broom" that is weak structurally. Trees that have had 30% or more of their bark removed during limb breakage probably will not survive. The root connection has been severed due to this bark damage. These trees also should be removed. However, pruning out damaged bark areas will help trees heal. Prune to shape the bark removal area as an elongated football. Portions of a tree with bark damage may die back however.

For the first year or so after storm damage, a tree may produce many unbalanced branches. Remove the weaker or undesirable limbs as they appear. The storm damage and pruning can cause a severe "shock" to the tree. Proper fertilization and tree watering will help counteract the shock.

Continued pruning and fertilization will help maintain balance, improve the tree's health, and help restore its beauty.

When replacing trees, consider what types can be more susceptible to storm damage. Some species less susceptible include Bur oak, Kentucky coffeetree, Little leaf linden and black walnut. Trees that tend to be more susceptible to damage include elms, Silver maple, Honeylocust and Marshall's green ash. Wait to do developmental pruning of newly planted trees until two to three years after planting. Unless there are multiple leaders and basal sprouts.