

Protect Your Trees from Storm Damage

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The pounding of rain or hail, the fury of wind and the weight of snow and ice test the strength of a tree's limbs, trunk and root system. The care you give your trees before and after a storm can be the key to their survival and keeping them from falling on your home, car or other valuable property.

Planting and Pruning

Carefully choose your trees and consider their location when you landscape. Know how large a young tree can be expected to grow to at maturity, and avoid planting it near wires, too close to a building, or in spots where it will be in danger of blowing over. Planting trees in groups, or planting species with naturally deep root systems can also help prevent trees from being blown down.

Choose species that are not prone to breakage and ones that are appropriate for local conditions. For example, in an area that frequently experiences early winter ice storms, a tree that holds its leaves until late in the season probably would not be a good choice.

To prevent weakness, trees should be pruned when they are young. As they grow, pruning dead or weakened limbs annually and thinning excess branches from the crown will help keep them strong. The goal is to produce a well-shaped tree with the center of gravity squarely over its trunk.

A professional arborist can strengthen tree crowns by installing flexible cabling, rigid bracing and/or lip-bolt through a weak or split crotch. This will allow the tree to function more as a single unit, with major limbs supporting each other. Water, fertilize and protect the soil from compaction to keep trees and roots healthy and vigorous.

After a Storm

The confusion following a major storm can result in removal of trees that could be saved or the improper weakening of a tree that can reduce its healthy life. Home owners can lose money as well as the beauty and practical benefits of their shade trees with poor advice and the services of fly-by-night tree “experts.”

Tree work can be extremely dangerous. A professional tree care company should be used when:

- a tree is large and requires high climbing or the use of a chain saw;
- a tree is leaning on a structure or entangled with another tree;
- wires are involved or structures are endangered;
- major repair of the tree is necessary;
- a large limb is split or broken but still attached to the tree;
- when you do not have the proper tools, knowledge or health to do tree work.

It is wise to get more than one estimate. When removals are necessary, have a clear understanding about who removes the limbs and debris from the property, and whether or not the price includes stump removal and clean-up. Your tree will have value as firewood or chips that should be considered in the estimate.

For more tips on landscaping and home maintenance, contact the Colorado State Forest Service or the Local Master Gardeners Group or visit www.nahb.org/forconsumers.