

Recognizing & Correcting Tree Hazards



Storm Damage Series

#6

Trees should be inspected for defects and hazardous conditions after a severe storm. Some trees are in danger of falling and have high immediate potential for serious injury or property damage. Others may have a lower immediate potential risk, but the long-term risk of significant injury or damage may still be too great to allow the questionable branch or tree to remain.

Hazards in trees need to be eliminated either by removing the tree or the affected branches or by some kind of corrective treatment. Following are descriptions of hazards common in storm-damaged trees and what can be done about them.

Electrical Hazards

Branches hanging over power lines are a major safety hazard. Special training is required by law to prune branches over power lines safely. Homeowners with tree branches that rub or may break power lines should contact the local power company or arborist trained in power line clearance to have the branches removed.

Structural Hazards

Trees and branches are hazards if they have a strong potential to fall and cause injury or property

damage. In many cases, the only practical solution is to remove the damaged branch or tree. Cabling and bracing are sometimes used to strengthen high-value trees, but these techniques are not routinely recommended and should be done only by trained, certified arborists.

Following a severe storm, homeowners should check trees for several kinds of hazardous defects:

- **Loose or broken branches.** These should be removed before they fall.

Left and middle: Inspect damaged trees for broken branches following a storm. Most trees with split trunks will not recover and need to be removed by a certified arborist.

Right: Trees near power lines should be treated only by power company employees or trained arborists.



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Left: A leaning tree indicates serious root failure. Trees leaning after a storm should be removed.

Right: Topped trees often develop small epicormic shoots on decaying branches that likely will fail in a later storm.



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- **Split trunks.** Trees with split trunks likely will fail completely in a later storm. They should be removed, or they can be cabled and braced if they have especially high value.
- **Trunks or branches with more than a third of their circumference lost.** This occurs on the trunk or a large branch where a branch was pulled out. The tree has a high risk for breaking and this kind of damage cannot be repaired adequately. The tree or branch should be removed.
- **Leaning trees.** A tree that is leaning after a storm has major root failure. Even a slight lean with a small area of raised soil at the base can mean significant potential for additional failure. Trees leaning due to a storm should be removed.

- **Do not try to support a damaged tree with rope, cable, wire, bolts or other materials.** The effort likely will not increase the

Below: Cabling sometimes is used to try to save a valuable tree, but it should be done only by a trained arborist. Using improper materials and technique (bottom photo) can damage a tree.



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tree's safety. If cabling and bracing are necessary, they should be done by a certified arborist.

- **Do not try to save a tree that was pushed over by a storm unless it was recently planted.** The tree's roots will likely never develop enough to support the tree adequately.
- **Do not top trees.** Topping is the indiscriminate cutting of large branches back to long stubs. Cuts are made without regard to the location of side branches, and over the years the tree will become even more of a hazard.
- **Do not use paint or wound dressing to cover wounds.** These interfere with the tree's natural wound-sealing process.
- **Do not fertilize damaged trees.** Nitrogen can make a stressed tree even more susceptible to insects and diseases and reduce its ability to deal with the damage.

What Not to Do

- **Do not attempt any pruning that cannot be done from the ground.** For safety reasons, large trees should be pruned only by certified arborists.

This series is based on a previous storm damage series researched and written by David Mooter.