

HOW TO RECOVER FROM A DISASTER

Storm damage to trees- whether caused by flood, freeze, wind, or other disasters- has some common components: Trees may be uprooted, and stems, branches, and roots may be broken or scarred.

But even though trees may be battered, and some killed, most trees that are still standing can survive. The trick is to help them recover from the damage and the stress, without creating additional problems for yourself. Here's some tips to help you do just that:



Lightning and wind can conspire to cause great damage to trees.

Remove Immediate Hazards First

To help keep you and your tree alive, the first step is to remove any immediate hazards. These include:

- Dead trees.
- Trees or branches that are leaning on trees, powerlines or other structures.
- Trees with broken or cracked stems.
- Trees that have lost 50 percent or more of their branches.
- Trees with broken roots.
- Any large, dead or broken limbs that are still attached to the tree.

Since removing tree hazards can be dangerous, don't attempt to learn on the job. "Big pruning is not something a homeowner should do, especially if they've never done it before," says Gary Moll, AMERICAN FORESTS' vice president for urban forestry. "You can do a lot of damage to the tree and seriously hurt yourself in the process.

Bill Kruidenier, president of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), agrees. Trimming large trees is for the pros, he says. "If the branch needing pruning can be trimmed from a stepladder, it's a homeowner-sized job. If you have to climb a tree, that's the time to call a professional."

Consult a professional arborist when confronted with the following situations:

- The work requires climbing or chainsaws.
- Any major repair- cabling, large branch removal.
- The tree or branch is leaning on another tree or structure. Contact your local telephone or electric company if any trees or branches are leaning on wires. These wires may be "hot," so let the utility take care of them.

Re-rooting Small Trees

Small, young trees that were uprooted by the storm can sometimes be rescued and re-rooted, especially if their roots were kept moist and much of their canopy was retained.

To re-root: First, prune any broken roots to prevent disease. Next, remove soil on the uprooted side so the roots can fit back into the hole. Carefully straighten the tree, without breaking any roots. Once the tree is upright, replace the soil and stake the tree to prevent movement for several months. Water the area thoroughly to remove air spaces around the roots,

Hiring an Arborist

"There were a tremendous number of vultures in human suits that descended on the victims of [Hugo], and tree-cutters were no exception," says Jay Clingman, South Carolina's coastal region urban forester. "The Forestry Commission and other governmental agencies published 'fair prices' through the media for various tree-care practices. This was highly unusual, but we were faced with contractors charging unknowing victim \$20,000 to remove two trees from their house."

Bob Felix, executive vice president of the National Arborist Association (NAA), concurs. "After a storm, everybody with a chainsaw becomes a tree expert. If a storm damages your trees, your long-term interests are best served by using trained, insured, and experienced professionals to remedy the problems."

Felix offers the following tips for contracting tree-care service after a storm:

- Be certain that the firm you hire is qualified and dependable. If you can, shop around. Contact local forestry groups, reputable local services, or government agencies to find reasonable prices. Only accept firm prices for work or, if the work must be done on a hourly basis, get competitive bids. Always establish a limit on hourly work beyond which the contractor cannot proceed without your approval.
- Select a firm that has a professional affiliation such as membership in the National Arborist Association (NAA) or the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Such affiliations are an indication that the firm uses the most current technology and has a commitment to professionalism. Call NAA or ISA for member firms in your area.
- Require the contractor to provide references and certificates of insurance (both worker's compensation and general liability). Require that all tree-related work be performed according to NAA Standards of Practice. These standards are available at no charge and can be obtained by written request (include a self-addressed stamped envelope).

Preventing Additional Damage

A few months later, after the immediate hazards have been removed and life has settled down, take some time to do some preventative pruning. Prune back any broken branches at the branch collar. Do not "top" trees or prune branches so that branch stubs extend beyond the branch collar. This will only weaken the tree in the future. By removing jagged branch stubs, the tree can cover its wounds with less risk of hazardous decay. Also, check your tree's form- if it has a lop-sided look, prune to balance the tree's canopy.

Some hazards might not show up at first- check for the following hazards every six months for several years. Contact a professional if the tree seems to need corrective work.

- **Root damage.** During a storm, the wind rocks trees and can damage the roots. The extent of root damage, which can kill a tree, is often not apparent for two or three years. The damage first becomes apparent as dieback, usually beginning from the top of the tree.
- **Decay.** Does the tree show signs of internal *rotting-fungus* on roots, in hollows, or on any dead spots? If so, determine if this is a major structural problem and hazard.
- **Insect attacks.** Stressed, dying, and dead trees attract insect pests. Remove insect-infested trees if these insects can damage nearby healthy trees.

-ANNE SEMRAU

◆ *The feature is sponsored by the USDA Forest Service.*