



The recent storms have dumped a load of ice and snow across Nebraska, but the brief period of warm temperatures have been welcomed with open arms. If the warm weather returns, take advantage of the temperatures to scout for potential issues in your landscape.

Heavy snow and ice build-up on plants can cause some problems. Enough build up can lead to limb breakage or even splits on limbs and trunks of trees. Ideally, allow the ice and snow to melt naturally from the limbs. Do not hit a branch to knock off the snow or ice, it can cause more damage to the plants.

Eventually, somewhere along the line, there will be some storm damage to trees. The Nebraska Forest Service has a few tips for homeowners who are caring for storm damaged trees:

- Safety at all times. Use caution around trees during and after extreme weather. Falling limbs and debris may be hazards long after the storm has passed.
- Inspect the trees for splits or cracks in the trunk. This might indicate a structural problem with the tree. If you think a tree has sustained structural damage, contact an arborist.
- Never climb a damaged tree to remove limbs or attempt clean up on a tree that is leaning.
- Be wary of individuals who go door-to-door to get your business, use a local reputable service.
- Pass on offers to top your tree. Topping harms the tree and increases the likelihood of structural problems and the trees recovery time after a storm.
- Wait for ice and snow to melt off of trees before pruning.
- Check the whole tree before pruning. First remove any dead, diseased, or broken branches that can easily be reached from the ground.
- If more than 50% of the tree's branches need to be removed due to storm damage, consult an arborist and consider removing the tree.

Winter is one of the best times of year to prune trees. Deciduous trees drop their leaves in the fall. The branching structure is more easily seen in winter because the lack of leaves on the trees and there is minimal sap flow. If the tree is pruned in spring, late March or early April, the sap is already flowing throughout the tree and the cut surfaces ooze or bleed sap. If it was an evergreen tree that sustained damage, they too can be pruned in the winter. Once you cut a limb on an evergreen branch to a section that doesn't have any green needles, it will not sprout new growth or new needles. It is best to cut the limb back to the trunk rather than to leave a bare stub.

If you are able to do the pruning yourself, get all of the facts to make sure you are not only pruning properly, but also safely. Winter can be one of the most potentially detrimental season to trees as well as a hazardous one for homeowners who do their own pruning. Getting all of the correct facts and asking for help can mean a safe season for all. For help on proper pruning techniques, the Nebraska Forest Service has multiple publications that deal with all tree related topics, including pruning storm damaged trees. This information can be found at <http://www.nfs.unl.edu/publications.asp>.

Be sure to have the correct information from a reputable source. If you are dealing with large trees or trees with significant storm damage, contact a certified arborist. Don't know who is a certified arborist in the area? Both the Nebraska Arborist Association and the International Society of Arboriculture's webpages offer a 'find arborists' searches for lists of certified arborists in your area.

Take advantage of the warm weather and do a little scouting in your landscape. With the proper care and maintenance, winter storms don't have to spell disaster for your trees.

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