

POST STORM DAMAGE TREE TIPS

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High winds recently broke a number of tree branches, toppled or tilted trees, and in some cases exposed carpenter ant nests.

Many broken branches have already been cleaned up. After clean-up, take time to recheck the tree to be sure branch stubs were not left during the initial clean up. A good pruning cut preserves the branch collar but does not leave a stub. Branch stubs that are left can lead to decay within the tree.

Continue to monitor trees for cracked or broken branches. During a storm, a branch may develop a crack but not fail completely. Windy days, or the added weight of rainfall or snow and ice during winter, can enlarge the size of the crack so it becomes noticeable. These branches are a hazard that need removal.

If a tree is leaning, it can be a difficult decision to turn it into firewood, but this may be the best choice. The decision to remove or try and save a leaning tree is best determined by tree size and extent of root damage.

If a young or small tree planted in the last five years is leaning, it could be straightened and treated like a newly planted tree. This may be successful if done as soon as possible. If roots are exposed or broken, it would be wise to replace the tree.

After straightening and staking a small tree, cover roots with soil to the same depth the roots were already growing. Do not place soil any deeper as this will cut off oxygen to roots and increase root loss.

After covering roots, gently firm the soil to assure there are no air pockets around the roots. Do not compact the soil, such as by stomping on it. Water to help settle the soil; then place a two to three inch layer of mulch in at least a four foot diameter ring around the tree but not against the trunk.

A small tree that has been reset will require staking for up to two years until the root system regrows. If, after one or two years, the tree still tends to lean or sway more than normal, it needs to be removed.

Large trees will typically not survive being pushed upright and staked after a storm. Those that do survive often create a hazard during the next storm because the root system is compromised.

If a large tree with a trunk greater than six inches in diameter has been pulled up-right and staked, consider removing the tree, especially if it is near a structure, power lines, or roadway.

If a large tree is not near anything that could be harmed or damaged if it topples again, and saving the tree is attempted, have a professional stake and brace it correctly. But know that the recommendation is to remove and replace it.

Carpenter ants may be noticed in broken trees. It is often assumed carpenter ants are to blame for weakening the tree. There is also concern about carpenter ants moving to nearby trees or homes.

Keep in mind carpenter ants do not eat wood. Carpenter ants build nests in wood that has become moist or decayed. They are often a secondary issue and not the primary cause of wood damage; although their nest building can increase damage within a tree or structure.

Carpenter ants typically do not invade solid, healthy wood that does not have moisture or decay issues. Removing a toppled tree or a large broken branch, along with the ant nest, is typically all that is needed to remove the ants. Insecticide treatment of nearby homes is not necessary.