

ICE AND SNOW LOADS ON PLANTS

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With ice build-up on plants last week, I had a few questions about what to do with weighted down branches and broken branches.

We were lucky we had a couple of windy days prior to the ice storm that blew many leaves off of trees. If that had not happened, breakage from the ice could have been much worse since ice would have built up on the leaves as well to increase the load.

When ice builds up on plant stems and branches, the best thing to do is nothing other than staying clear of tree branches that might break.

Snow and ice loads on trees and shrubs can result in breakage. However, improper removal of ice or snow by homeowners from a tree or shrub can increase damage and be a safety hazard.

With ice, we advise clients to allow it to melt naturally. Homeowners should never break ice off of trees or shrubs by beating ice covered branches.

If it is safe to do so, snow loads can be gently brushed off trees with a broom. While branches may be severely weighed down, if not broken, most evergreen and other branches will return to normal.

When heavy ice or snow loads result in broken branches, homeowners should turn to professional arborists for assistance, especially with large trees.

Damaged trees require immediate attention to remove broken branches that pose the greatest hazard. Broken but firmly attached branches posing no immediate danger can be pruned after more hazardous branches are removed.

Correct pruning cuts are important for tree recovery and the trees ongoing health. Do not make flush cuts on the trunk and don't leave branch stubs. A flush cut removes the branch collar and branch bark ridge, creating a larger wound that does not seal well.

If a branch breaks in its center, it should not be pruned right at the point of breakage as this will likely leave a stub.

Instead, pruning cuts should be made where the damaged branch attaches to the trunk or to another main branch. It is at these points a tree is best able to seal wounds to reduce the risk of decay.

If dangerous branches need to be removed in a hurry for safety, and correct pruning cuts are not made at that time, such as leaving branch stubs, it is important these stubs eventually be removed in early spring or early summer.

And with any pruning cut or tree wound, do not treat these with any type of paint or wound dressing. These products interfere with the trees ability to seal off wounds.

Source: UNL Hort Update, November 2020.