

Reducing Storm Damage by Pruning Trees



Downed trees and branches can cause a lot of damage to homes and vehicles as a result of storms. Even if a tree does not fall on anything, there is still a cost to removing a downed tree or branches, and a cost to replace the tree. Windstorms are the main cause of trees or limbs breaking or falling, but lightning, heavy snow and ice can also bring down branches or even whole trees. Below are some tips to help maintain your trees to protect them against future storms.

Healthy Trees Cause Less Damage in Storms

- Ensuring a tree's health is one way to prevent damage during a storm. A weak or diseased tree is much more likely to topple or break in a storm. A tree with mushrooms or conks growing on it probably already has some level of rot, which weakens the tree. Getting abnormalities checked by an arborist is a great way to help prevent or treat rot or disease.

Tree Pruning Prevents Limb Breakage

- Proper pruning of trees is a major part of helping prevent tree damage during a storm. There is a science and skill to pruning trees, and should therefore only be done by a professional.
- Young Trees
 - After planting a young new tree, it is important to learn about how to care for it through the years, including pruning. One of the most important steps is to ensure that the tree develops only one main trunk, called the leader. Trees that develop two trunks right from the bottom are much more susceptible to splitting during a storm.
 - Through the years, keep in mind the function of the tree and the overall vision for it. An example is that shade trees can have lower branches pruned out, but trees that are meant to screen views should maintain those lower branches. Having a vision will help immensely when explaining to an arborist what you would like the tree to look like after pruning.
- Mature Trees
 - Mature trees need specific guidelines to be pruned in order to prevent as many wounds as possible. Limbs with living foliage should not be cut off at random, as it will cause the tree excessive stress. Young trees can withstand heavy pruning much easier than mature trees. Try to limit pruning to just dead and diseased limbs, if possible.
 - To maintain a mature tree that will be wind resistant, the lowest limb should be about one-third of the way up the trunk. The lower two-thirds of the tree should have at least half the foliage. It is not good to "top" a tree because that makes the tree susceptible to internal decay at every cut. The waterspouts that will grow out of the cut places will be structurally unsound. Always maintain the tree's natural shape when pruning a tree. It will look more attractive and be more stable during a storm.
- General Pruning Guidelines
 - Branch angles are an important factor to consider when pruning. A narrow angle is a sign of a future weak point for most hardwoods. A U-shaped angle is preferable to a V-shaped one. Another way to judge a sturdy angle is the branch should be at 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock from the trunk. When two branches are allowed to grow too closely to one another, neither one will have the space to grow properly.
 - Branches should grow no more than one-half to three-quarters of the size of the main trunk. If they grow larger than that, they will be heavier than the trunk can support, and be easier to break off. The tree should be examined every so often to check if it is lopsided or leaning to one side. Keeping a tree balanced will help keep it from falling in a storm.
 - When a limb is cut off, cut it back to where it grows out of the trunk, leaving the branch collar. Limbs should not be cut partway down. This will cause new shoots to grow from the stub, making it even more susceptible to damage.