



Reducing Tree Damage

Falling trees and limbs cause millions of dollars in damage each year damaging homes and cars and downing power lines. Some trees are also notorious for aggressively sending out roots that can damage the foundation of a house, buckle sidewalks or clog septic systems. Homeowners are a first line of defense, but often neglect taking their surroundings into consideration when trying to protect or prepare their property. The Institute for Business & Home Safety developed several ways to help prevent tree damage. It is important to regularly examine trees and check for damage or other trouble signs. Some potential problems are easy to spot. These include:

- Cracks in the trunk or major limbs
- Hollow/decayed trees (mushrooms growing from the bark, may indicate decayed or weakened stem)
- Trees that look one-sided or lean significantly
- Branches hanging over the house near the roof
- Limbs in contact with power lines
- V-shaped forks rather than U-shaped ones (V-shaped are more likely to split)
- Crossing branches that rub or interfere with one other

Good pruning can prevent many problems and removal of diseased, damaged or dead plant parts helps limit the spread of harmful insects and disease, and may help reduce future storm damage. As always, please use your best judgment when doing any home maintenance and consult a professional as needed. For tree care, experts offer these tips:

- Check local tree regulations prior to pruning or tree removal
- Avoid pruning branches flush to the trunk. Doing so removes not only the limb but some of the trunk wood, opening the plant to possible decay or insect damage.
- Begin by making a cut part way through the bottom of any limb to be trimmed, a few inches from the trunk. Then cut through the limb just above the first cut. This ensures that when the limb falls, it will not tear off a long strip of bark on the way down.
- Finish by cutting off the few inches sticking out from the trunk. Leave the "branch collar," (swollen area of trunk tissue that forms around the base of a branch) as this protects the main trunk from damage.

It is just as important to care for storm damaged trees. IBHS recommends taking the following steps:

- Plan ahead before deciding what to do with fallen trees – in general, it is best to reset only smaller trees, since large trees will be weakened and may fall again (when straightened, uprooted trees will require bracing for a long time; leave guy wires or braces for two years).
- Before you reset a tree, cut, smooth and paint all jagged and irregular root breaks
- Water the tree well and fertilize
- After repairing trees, continue to care for them. Check soil moisture regularly.
- Prune a damaged tree just enough to balance the loss of roots
- Cut out broken, diseased and malformed branches to give the tree a desirable shape
- If leaving stumps, cut them off flush with the ground. If removing, leave four feet of stump standing. Removal will be cheaper and easier if stumps can be pulled instead of dug out.
- Cut off broken or torn limbs to avoid unnecessary bark stripping

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