

Evaluating Storm-Damaged Landscape Trees

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A storm can leave trees in your yard looking like there's no tomorrow. Major limbs may be broken or damaged, foliage can be shredded or stripped, or the bark may be torn or gouged. Before writing off your landscape tree as a "goner," evaluate by asking the following questions:



Other than the storm damage, is the tree basically healthy and vigorous? If the tree is basically healthy, is not creating a hazard, and did not suffer major structural damage, it will generally recover if first aid measures are applied immediately after the storm.

Are major limbs broken? The larger a broken limb, the harder it will be for the tree to recover. If a majority of the main branches are gone, the tree may have little chance of surviving.

Has the leader (the main upward-trending branch on most trees) been lost? In species where a leader is important to upward growth or desirable appearance, it may have to be a judgment call. The tree may live without its leader, but at best would be stunted or deformed.

Is at least 50% of the tree's crown (branches and leaves) still intact? This is a good rule of thumb on tree survivability. A tree with less than half of its branches remaining may not be able to produce enough foliage to nourish the tree through another season.

How big are the wounds where branches or bark has been damaged? The larger the wound is in relation to the size of the limb, the less likely it is to heal, leaving the tree vulnerable to disease and pests. A two- to three-inch wound on a 12-inch diameter limb will seal over with new bark within a couple of years.

Are there remaining branches that can form a new branch structure? The remaining limbs will grow more vigorously as the tree tries to replace its missing foliage. Look to see if branches are in place that can eventually fill out the tree's appearance.

Once you evaluate the condition of the tree, begin proper treatment and repair to maintain the health of the trees.

- **It's a Keeper** - If damage is relatively slight, prune any broken branches, repair torn bark or rough edges around wounds, and let the tree begin the process of wound repair.
- **Too Young to Die** - Young trees can sustain quite a bit of damage and still recover quickly. If the leader is intact and the structure for future branching remains, remove the broken branches and let the tree close over the wounds and recover itself.
- **Wait and See** - If a valuable tree appears to be a borderline case, resist the temptation to simply cut the tree down and be done with it. In such cases, it may be best to stand back for a while and think it over. Remember that time is on your side. After careful pruning of broken branches, give the tree some time to recover. A final decision can be made later.

- **Say Goodbye** - Some trees simply can't be saved or are not worth saving. If the tree has already been weakened by disease, if the trunk is split, or more than 50 percent of the crown is gone, the tree has lost its survival edge.

Some of your trees may have damage that's too close to call, or may have hidden damage. To help with such questions, a tree professional may be needed to help you decide what to do about your trees.

Don't hire just anyone who shows up at your door following a storm. Look for qualified arborists in the phone book or by contacting your county or city forester.

Resources for Urban Forestry Related Assistance

Alabama Cooperative Extension System (www.aces.edu) Through the work of more than 500 Extension agents and other field-based staff, in addition to specialists in many facets of our six program areas, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System is bringing the research and knowledge of the land-grant universities and the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, and the expertise of many of our partners, to people.

Alabama Urban Forestry Association (www.aufa.com) This statewide nonprofit organization is made up of a diverse membership of professionals, horticulturists, landscape workers, tree board members, tree care volunteers, and interested citizens who care about trees where they live and work. Services are designed to support members' efforts to replant, maintain, sustain, and expand the urban landscape.

Urban Forestry South Expo (www.urbanforetrysouth.org/) This "exposition" is a comprehensive library of works of science that promotes and expands urban and community forestry to an audience of urban forestry managers, urban forestry councils, universities, public managers and elected officials, and citizen activists, in an effort to stimulate greater public interest.

International Society of Arboriculture (www.isa-arbor.com) The International Society of Arboriculture is a worldwide professional organization dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation for trees and to promoting research, technology, and the professional practice of arboriculture.

National Arbor Day Foundation (www.arborday.org/media/stormindex.cfm) This section of the National Arbor Day Foundations website contains articles and artwork about how communities and individuals can save damaged trees following storms.

Tree Care Industry Association (www.natlarb.com) TCIA develops safety and educational programs, standards of tree care practice, and management information for arboriculture firms around the world.

Source: National Arbor Day Foundation



This information is provided by the Alabama Forestry Commission

For more information please visit: www.forestry.alabama.gov