

Recommendations for Ice-Damaged Trees

By David Mercker, University of Tennessee Extension Forester

Ice storms can cause wide-spread and, in some cases, irreparable damage to woodland trees. The loss of healthy limbs, particularly when excessive, is never desirable. This is especially the case with large, old, and/or weak trees because their ability to replenish food supply can be diminished beyond the point of recovery. In such cases, trees normally begin a gradual starvation that ends in death. The process of dying can occur in a few short seasons, or the trees can languish for several years.

Professionals often place distressed trees into a “triage” – those that can be saved, those that might be saved, and those that cannot be saved. Knowing which category your tree(s) are in can be challenging and may require professional input.

Completely removing a tree is a difficult decision, but if mortality is unavoidable, removal is a much better option than spending time and money on attempts to revive it. As a general guideline, the criteria for deciding whether or not to remove a damaged tree include: a) when 40 percent of the crown has been lost or severely damaged (crown refers to live branches), b) if the tree was already declining, or c) in cases when the tree has become a hazard as a result of the damage. If in doubt as to whether a tree will or will not make it, allow it to stand and assess progress over the next few years. Younger trees, those 40 years old or less, are more likely to recover from damage than are older ones.

Damage always appears worse immediately after the storm. Greening of the trees will occur again, and many will make full recovery. For additional information on treatment for storm damaged trees, see the following publications: *Evaluating Storm-Damaged Landscape Trees* (http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/PDFs/ResourceSheets/Storm_Recovery/Evaluating_storm-damaged_landscape_trees.pdf) or *Storm-Damaged Residential Trees: Assessment, Care, and Prevention* (<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/spfiles/sp575.pdf>).

When it is time to replant, go with those species that are time-tested as being resistant to ice damage. The University of New Hampshire has a concise publication addressing tree features that influence ice storm resistance. Included is a list of species that are recommended for yard settings. It can be found at: <http://www.extension.unh.edu/forestry/Docs/iceresis.PDF>

Woodland landowners having experienced financial loss from ice damage may be eligible to recover a portion by claiming a casualty loss on their taxes. The amount recoverable, however, is limited to the tax basis. ☹