

Hurricane Preparedness for Your Trees

High winds and heavy rain can wreak havoc on weak and stressed trees, causing branches to snap or trees to uproot. Are your trees ready for the next storm?

There is no such thing as a hurricane-resistant landscape, however, with proper care and timely maintenance overseen by a certified arborist, trees can be more resistant to storm damage. Only a certified arborist can ensure that your trees are being properly cared for and have optimal growing conditions.

Pruning is Vital to Hurricane Damage Prevention

A strong, deep-rooted tree may not fall during a storm, but weak limbs in the canopy may. Broken, dead and damaged limbs can be torn from trees during a storm and turned into dangerous projectiles. Regular pruning done by a professional over the course of the tree's life can create a sturdy, well-spaced framework of healthy branches with an open canopy that allows wind to flow freely through.

Trees to Watch Out For

- Trees with dense canopies
- Dead or dying trees
- Trees with codominant trunks
- New plantings and young trees

Consult a certified arborist to see if these, or any other tree hazards, exist around your home.

After the Hurricane Has Passed

Assess your property for damage and threats. An arborist should be contacted if you: need a chainsaw or ladder to prune away dead, dying or loose branches, if power lines are down, if you are unsure of the structural stability of a tree, or if you do not know if your tree can be saved. In some cases, even a tree that has sustained some damage (defoliated, broken, or blown over) can be treated.

Trees have a much better chance at surviving a storm if they have received proper care. Remember, healthy trees adjust quickly to changes in the environment and are may be more resilient to storm damage. Therefore, if you are proactive and take the necessary steps to minimize storm damage before it occurs, you can reduce the risk of property damage and save yourself a great hassle and expense.

Tips for up-righting small fallen trees

Young trees planted within the last few years that have not yet established wide root systems are most susceptible to toppling over in hurricane-force winds. But downed trees aren't necessarily a total loss. Many, particularly those under 16 feet in height, can be re-set after the storm passes, but homeowners should take precautions and know when to call in experts. If a tree in your yard blows over in a hurricane:

- Assess potential danger in approaching a fallen tree, looking for downed wires or limbs in overhead wires. Stay away and report any hazardous conditions.
- Remove only those limbs that are blocking access to your home or vehicle or are posing an immediate danger to people or property.
- Cover and shade the exposed rootball with burlap, old sheets, towels or several layers of newspaper and wet down thoroughly. Do not use plastic. Cover the exposed trunk and branches to prevent sun-scalding. Keep the rootball wet (for up to several weeks) while you take care of more pressing post-storm recovery activities.
- To re-set a tree, dig out a wide area on the rootball side of the tree. Protect the trunk with a cushion of towels or soft material, and pull the tree back upright into the hole. Make sure it is straight and level, sitting no higher or lower than its original grade. Fill in with half the original soil, water thoroughly to remove air pockets, then finish filling in. Water thoroughly. Do not stake the tree unless it cannot stand by itself.
- Cover the entire area under the tree with 4 to 6 inches of organic mulch, like chipped wood, and keep it watered thoroughly for the next 6 months, through the entire winter dry season. Treat it like a newly-transplanted tree, which it is.
- Broken or damaged branches should be removed by making a clean cut just outside the juncture of trunk and the branch. Some branches can be cut out for structural stability or appearance, but the remaining branches should not be shortened or sheared.

Homeowners should be wary of post-storm chainsaw amateurs or unlicensed tree trimmers who offer to top your tree or remove it hastily. If the tree is too heavy to pull up by hand and if you're tempted to hitch it to a car to pull up, it's probably too big to re-set safely by yourself and you should call in a certified arborist.

Qualified arborists can show proof of insurance for workers compensation, comprehensive and liability, and membership in professional organizations such as Florida Arborist Association, the National Arborist Association, the International Society of Arboriculture, or the American Society of Consulting Arborists.