

Did a Storm Damage Your Tree?

Winter storms cause tremendous stress and severe damage to trees in the urban forest. Obviously, a snapped or downed tree should be removed. What about a tree that suffers minor damage? How can a homeowner tell if a tree is safe?

Assessing the Damage

Minor damage – with only the smallest branches of the tree being injured – usually results in little or no permanent injury to the tree. All that is required is cleanup of the broken twigs and branches and perhaps a crown cleaning or thinning prune to restore a pleasing shape.

More severe damage – large broken branches, split crotches, removal of bark and splitting or splintering of the trunk – can be caused by strong winds and heavy ice storms. When a tree is severely damaged, the first question that must be answered is: “Is the condition of the tree such that keeping it is worthwhile?” A tree care professional should be consulted to answer this question.

“Most arborists will take the time and effort to save a tree only if the tree will still be healthy, attractive, and of value to the property owner after repairs,” explains Tchukki Andersen, staff arborist for the Tree Care Industry Association. “A tree care expert may recommend removal of a tree that has brittle wood and a branch structure that makes it vulnerable to additional damage from future storms. Trees that have been topped by storms are prime candidates for removal,” says Andersen.

Other factors to consider when determining if a tree is worth saving:

- species
- age
- growing location
- value it adds to the property
- sentimental value

If a tree is not worth saving, remove it as soon as possible. If it is not removed and the tree dies, it could become a hazard tree. Removal of hazard trees is dangerous to the tree care crew and requires special techniques, adding to the cost.

Treating the Tree

Assuming the decision has been made to repair the tree, the next question is: “Am I capable of repairing the damage myself or should I seek professional help?” Major repair will undoubtedly require the use of a chain saw and climbing equipment. Unless one is experienced in the use of such equipment and comfortable working off the ground, it may be best to have the work performed by a competent professional. The Tree Care Industry Association maintains a list of member companies in your area.

Inspect your trees for damage after a storm. If a tree has hazards, such as broken, hanging limbs, or a split branch union (sometimes called a branch fork), you should have a reputable tree care company give an assessment. This is important because you could be held liable if the hazard branch or tree falls and damages property or causes personal injury.

What should you do?

Homeowners who would like a professional arborist to assess their trees should contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a 70-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA also has the nation’s only Accreditation program that helps consumers find tree care companies that have been inspected and accredited based on: adherence to industry standards for quality and safety; maintenance of trained, professional staff; and dedication to ethics and quality in business practices. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the “Locate Your Local TCIA Member Companies” program. You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP code search on the TCIA Web site, www.tcia.org.

Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact editor@tcia.org.