

The recent storms have reminded us about what severe weather can do. They have been a good reminder to have a severe weather plan in place, and that includes one for your trees. Take advantage of the break in the rain and storms to scout for potential issues in your landscape trees.

It is unavoidable that somewhere along the line there will be some storm damage to trees. Strong winds can cause damage to tree limbs. The Nebraska Forest Service has a few tips for homeowners who are caring for storm damaged trees:

- Safety at all times. Use caution around trees during and after extreme weather. Falling limbs and debris may be hazards long after the storm has passed.
- Inspect the trees for splits or cracks in the trunk. This might indicate a structural problem with the tree. If you think a tree has sustained structural damage, contact an arborist.
- Never climb a damaged tree to remove limbs or attempt clean up on a tree that is leaning.
- Be wary of individuals who go door-to-door to get your business following a storm, use a local reputable service.
- Pass on offers to top your tree. Topping harms the tree and increases the likelihood of structural problems and the trees recovery time after a storm.
- Check the whole tree before pruning. First remove any dead, diseased, or broken branches that can easily be reached from the ground.

If more than 50% of the tree's branches need to be removed due to storm damage, consult an arborist and consider removing the tree.

Be sure to have the correct information from a reputable source. If you are dealing with large trees or trees with significant storm damage contact a certified arborist. Don't know who is a certified arborist in the area? Both the Nebraska Arborist Association and the International Society of Arboriculture's webpages offer a 'find arborists' searches for lists of certified arborists in your area. Certified arborists have additional certification and training related to the health and care of trees.

If you are able to do the pruning yourself, get all of the facts to make sure you are not only pruning properly, but also safely. The best time of year to prune deciduous trees is when they are dormant and don't have leaves in the winter. The second best time to prune is when the pruning tools are sharp. Getting all of the correct facts and asking for help can mean the job can be completed safely. The Nebraska Forest Service has multiple publications that deal with all tree related topics, even pruning storm damaged trees. This information can be found at <http://www.nfs.unl.edu/publications.asp>.

In order to make cuts that heal correctly on plants, the proper tools are needed. When pruning small branches, those that are 1" in diameter or smaller, hand pruners are recommended. If you have to twist the pruners or take multiple 'bites' at the branch, a different tool is needed. For branches that have a diameter greater than 1", loppers are recommended. Pruning saws are extremely sharp and work well to get into the tight places that the pruners and loppers don't fit. They can also cut branches that are larger than 1.5" in diameter. The last tool of the trade is the hedge shears. They are used for shearing hedges or shaping plants and shouldn't be used as substitutes for other pruning equipment.

There are two main pruner types, by-pass and anvil. By-pass pruners work like a pair of scissors, with the sharp blade by-passing the stationary blade. Anvil pruners have a blade that closes down on a flat edge. They have an action that is similar to a knife against a cutting board.

Take advantage of the warm weather and do a little scouting in your landscape. With the proper care and maintenance, winter storms don't have to spell disaster for your trees.

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