



Hurricanes & Trees

Can These Trees Be Saved?

A storm can leave trees 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. But what at first glance may look like mortal wounds are not necessarily fatal to a tree. Trees have an amazing ability to recover from storm damage.

FIRST ASSESS THE DAMAGE

Before writing off a damaged tree as a "goner", homeowners should evaluate their trees 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 is, the harder it will be for the tree to repair the damage. If the majority of the main branches are gone, the tree may have little chance of surviving.

Has the leader, (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 judgement call. The tree may live without its leaders, but at best would be a stunted or deformed version of the original.

Is at least 50 percent 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 have been broken 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.

Is the tree of a desirable species for its location? If the tree is in the wrong location (such as a potentially tall tree beneath a power line) or an undesirable species for the property (messy fruit, etc.) it may be best to remove it if it has serious damage.

NOW, MAKE THE DECISION

The questions listed above will help you make informed decisions about your trees. In general, the answer will fall into one of three categories:





1. It's a keeper

If damage is relatively slight, prune any broken branches, repair torn bark or rough edges around wounds.

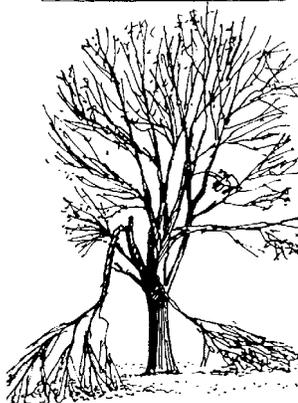


An Easy Call

A mature, healthy shade tree will survive the loss of one major limb. The broken branch should be removed properly.

Minor Damage

Although the tree has been damaged, enough strong limbs may remain on a basically healthy tree to make saving it possible.



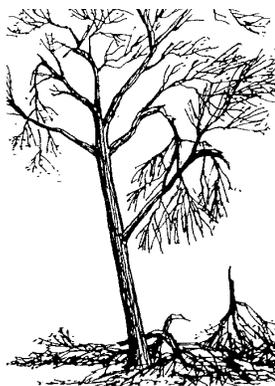
Too Young to Die

Young trees can sustain quite a bit of damage and still mend quickly. If the leader is intact and the structure for future branching remains, remove the broken branches and let the tree repair itself.



2. 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.



Easy Does It

Resist temptation to prune too heavily. Remember that the tree will need all of the foliage it can produce in order to make it through the next growing season. Remove only the damaged limbs, wait and see what happens.

Hold Off

A healthy mature tree can recover even when several major limbs are damaged. With large trees, a professional arborist should be

contacted to assess damage on a borderline situation, and to safely accomplish needed pruning and branch removal.



3. 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.

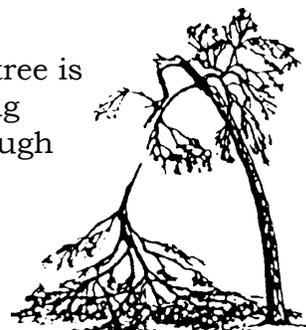
Tree Tragedy

This otherwise healthy young tree has lost its crown – the leafy head that is vital for its survival. It will not be able to grow enough new branches and leaves to provide needed nourishment, and will never be able to regain its former beautiful shape.



Hopeless Case

About all that's left of this tree is its trunk. The few remaining branches can't provide enough foliage to enable the tree to make it through another growing season.



Say It's Over

A rotten inner core in the trunk or structural weakness in branching patterns can cause a split trunk – the tree equivalent of a heart attack. The wounds are too large to ever mend, and the tree has lost its sap lifeline between roots and leaves. The tree is all but dead.



Ask for Advice

Seek help from a tree professional and hire a licensed arborist if tree work is needed.