

Tree Care Following Storm Damage

Severe thunderstorms in recent weeks have caused widespread damage to trees throughout Barron County. Treatment of storm-damaged trees requires wise decisions and prompt action. Repairs come in two stages: first aid for immediate attention; and follow-up work to be distributed over a period of months to several years.

First decide if the tree is worth saving. If over 30 to 50 percent of the main branches or trunk are severely split, broken, or mutilated, the benefit of extensive repairs is questionable. If the trees are close to power lines, buildings or other structures, the tree should be removed by a professional. Extremely old, low-vigor trees might not have the ability to recover.

Cut off broken and split branches but delay pruning to reshape the tree. Too much removal of wood in one season can create such problems as sunscald, weak branching habits, and sucker growth. Promptly remove all debris such as broken branches and prunings to help eliminate breeding grounds for insects and diseases.

Injured trees take time to heal. Repair methods are geared toward assisting the tree in healing as quickly as possible. Most repair work involves pruning. Use correct pruning techniques to minimize the size of the wound and avoid flush cuts. Remove large, uneven stubs by pruning back to an undamaged side branch. Wound dressings are not recommended.

Trees suffering severe injury as a result of storms aren't always the luck of the draw. Certain tree species are much more susceptible to damage than others. For instance, silver maples, willows, and green ash can suffer considerable damage. Other factors that play a part in storm damage include age and maintenance history of the tree. Large old trees, improperly pruned trees, and those trees with narrow crotch angles can be particularly susceptible to damage.

Following the cleanup and repair of storm damaged trees, you may wish to make some new plantings. A few suggestions can help reduce future maintenance problems. First, make certain the tree being considered is hardy to our area. Then, consider the potential insect and/or disease problems which may be associated with a particular species. It is also helpful to know the approximate size and shape of the tree when mature. This will help determine where to plant it to minimize pruning due to interference with utility lines, branches rubbing against the house or other buildings, etc. Finally, consider characteristics of the tree other than the provision of shade, such as presence of spring flowers, attractiveness to birds, fall color and winter appearance.

Recommended tree species for Wisconsin including information on growth habits, are included in the "Guide to Selecting Landscape Plants for Wisconsin". This publication is available from the Barron County UW-Extension Office in Barron or by calling 537-6250.