

Homeowner Questions
Answered by:
Mona Bawgus, Consumer Horticulturist

Question: I experienced major tree damage as did most of my neighbors. Is there any way of saving some of these old beautiful trees or do they need to all be cut down?

Answer: So many beautiful trees were damaged and the question that homeowners are asking is will the tree survive. In our haste to get things cleaned up, a quick decision may lead to unnecessarily cutting down a tree. Trees are amazingly resilient and may recover with proper care and time. On the other hand sentimental value may hinder a homeowner from cutting down a tree that poses a danger to their home.

Safety must be the first concern. Assess your tree by looking for any limbs or branches that are in danger of falling immediately or if a future storm occurs. If your tree is split it does not mean that there is no hope. The branch should be evaluated by an arborist and may be able to be braced. All smaller branches that are damaged can be removed by the homeowner with loppers or a pruning saw. Hand shears work best on limbs smaller than one quarter of an inch and loppers for up to 1.5 inches.

Any limbs that have broken off and left a jagged break on the trunk should be cleaned up to facilitate the growth of a callus to form a natural seal. For larger limbs a certified arborist has the tools and equipment to safely cut down the larger and higher up branches. Cutting a branch that was split during a storm is very different than cutting a piece of firewood. Branches become twisted and bent and are under tremendous stress. When cut the quick release of energy can be very dangerous.

When searching for a qualified arborist the following questions should be asked. Are they part of an established business, do they have current certificates of insurance, do they belong to a professional organization such as the International Society of Arboriculture, National Arborist Association or the American Society of Consulting Arborists. Certified arborists are trained and are up to date with the current technical information on tree care, repair and removal.

Pruning sealants or paint are no longer recommended for treating wounds. In fact there is some evidence that they may interfere with the natural healing process of the tree. Unfortunately the wounded area will always be a weak spot that will be more susceptible to disease, rotting, and insects. A mature shade tree will usually survive the loss of one major limb. With small trees if the leader is not damaged it will also most likely recover.

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