

Archive for December, 2010

Storm Damage – Assessing The Damage

Sunday, December 5th, 2010

HOW BAD IS IT ?

After the initial crisis has subsided and all safety concerns are addressed, it is time to step back and assess the actual damage(s) done to the individual trees in your landscape. Many times the damage is fairly light, with only a few weak limbs and branches broken. First remove any broken or loosely attached branches to avoid further damage to any tree you'd like to keep. Of course, these limbs/branches should be properly pruned from the tree using natural pruning guidelines (i.e. remove limb/branches back at the point of attachment, don't disturb the branch collar, etc.). Branches that have pulled away from the trunk, but not broken off completely, should be severed at the bottom of the tear.

Never top or severely prune storm damaged trees. Topping further weakens trees and will subject them to even more damage in future storms.

Don't worry if the trees appearance looks a little ragged after the corrective pruning is properly completed. Give the tree time to recover before doing more. A healthy tree (pre-storm) can recover fairly quickly, if given half a chance, and may return to it's natural beauty without any more work needing to be done. If a valuable tree appears to be a borderline case, and you're not sure what to do, take a step back and think about what should be done. Don't rush to simply remove the tree and be done with it. As stated before, **time is on your side**. After carefully pruning broken branches, give the tree time to recover. A final decision to remove a tree can be made later, if necessary.

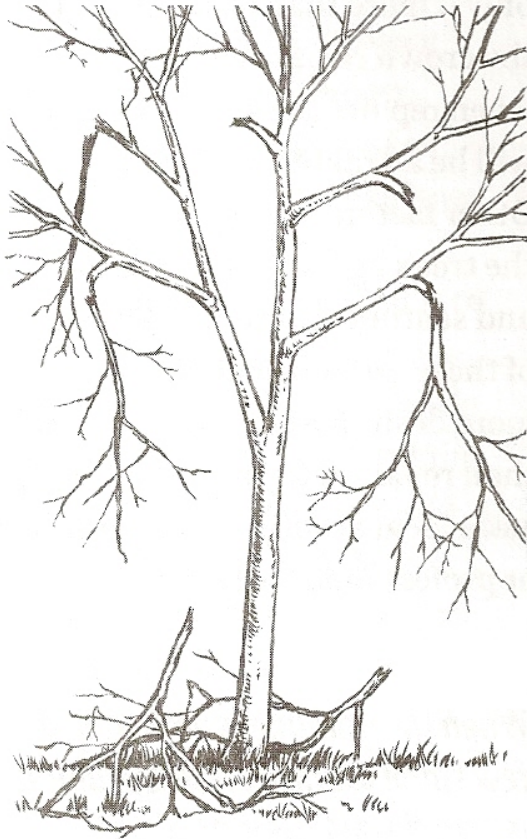
NEXT TIME – WHEN TO REMOVE THE TREE COMPLETELY

EXPERTS AGREE

DON'T

TOP YOUR

TREE



After carefully pruning broken branches, give the tree time to recover. Often new foliage will return the tree to its natural beauty. If not, the decision to remove the tree can always be made later.



Remove broken branches at the bottom of the rip. The dotted line above shows where to cut.

Storm Damage – When To Remove A Tree Completely

Saturday, December 11th, 2010

After a storm, some trees simply cannot be saved, and should be removed completely. In general, if a tree has already been weakened by disease, the trunk is split, or more than 50% of the crown is gone, the tree should be removed. In addition, if a tree is tipped over, but not completely down, it means that the roots were severely damaged or poorly developed before a storm tipped it over. It's a condition we foresters call "root sprung," and such trees do not usually survive well (much less grow well). Even if it does survive, a root sprung tree still poses serious risk of falling at a later date. A very young tree may survive and grow if it is gently pulled back to its vertical position, but very seldom will a young healthy tree become root sprung.

The decision to remove a tree can sometimes be daunting and one that you may not wish to make. However, circumstances, and your responsibility as a homeowner/landowner requires that the decision be made when appropriate. Hacking away at a severely damaged tree does not do your landscape or property value any favors, nor does it do the tree any good; it usually only prolongs a bad situation. Sometimes the kindest cut is the one made at the base of the stem.

In summary, **REMOVE A STORM DAMAGED TREE WHEN:**

- 1. IT HAS ALREADY BEEN SEVERLY WEAKENED BY DISEASE.**
- 2. THE TRUNK IS SPLIT.**
- 3. MORE THAN 50% OF THE CROWN IS GONE.**
- 4. THE TREE HAS BEEN ROOT SPRUNG.**

Next Time: Selecting An Arborist.

*A tree that loses
50 percent or
more of its
crown should be
removed.*



*Trees with split trunks have been
severely weakened and should
be removed.*



Hiring just anyone who shows up at your door may result in fatal damage to your trees. It's best to go with a qualified professional arborist.

—National Arbor Day Foundation illustration

When hiring someone to work on your trees (whether storm damaged or not), be sure you use a certified, experienced professional arborist. How do you find someone like that?

1. **Look in the phone book.** Such a listing does not, necessarily, mean they are good, but it does indicate they are locally owned and permanent, and should be easy to locate later, if something goes awry.
2. **Ask for proof of certification.** Also check to see if they are members of professional organizations. Such certification and/or memberships mean that the arborist is adhering to the standards and ethics of that group, plus they are pursuing annual updates in knowledge through continuing education activities.
3. **Ask for proof of worker's compensation and liability insurance.** Responsible, qualified arborists have no problem in providing such documentation, and, in fact, may do it on a routine basis, of their own accord
4. **Ask for local references.** Good arborists are proud of their work and will gladly provide a list of past clients.

5. **Do not accept take it now deals.** Especially if they are from someone who just shows up after a storm, is not local, and offers no credentials, references, etc.

6. **Get several bids for your work.** But keep in mind that the best arborist for you may not be the lowest bidder. The lowest bid does not always mean it's the best *value* for the price.

7. **Good arborists do not recommend tree topping!** They will recommend removal and replacement instead.

8. **Good arborists do not use tree climbing spikes, unless the tree is going to be removed, or someone is hurt.** Spikes damage trees unnecessarily, under normal circumstances.

Next Time: Reducing Damage From Future Storms

Lowering The Chance of Tree Damage In Future Storms

Friday, December 31st, 2010

With the right type of tree for your homescape, and, with a little proper care through the years, you can reduce the amount of damage your trees will sustain in storms. You cannot completely eliminate storm damage, since the forces of nature can overcome even the best efforts of people to thwart “the forces,” but following some of the recommendations below will help your trees withstand light to medium (normal) storm events, and will minimize damage from the heavier storms that seem to come with more regularity lately.

Right Tree, Right Place – First and foremost, when planting trees, make sure you have the right tree for your yard. No where is this axiom more important than in preventing/reducing damage from storms. Avoid planting species that are prone to breakage (brittle), such as silver maple, boxelder, poplars, and Bradford pears. Think ahead when planting, and gather all the information you can about species selection for your area. There are many sources of free information available, such as our own website, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and the National Arbor Day Foundation. Local nurseries, certified arborists, and urban forestry consultants are also good sources of information, if you do not mind paying a fee for their service(s). **Start out with the right tree, and you will avoid a lot of trouble, later on, no matter what happens.**

Prune Early – Get your trees strength conditioning system started early by following proper pruning techniques, as outlined in a number of places, including this blog. The goal is to produce a well-shaped tree with the center of gravity squarely over the trunk with a crown that lets the wind pass through rather than catching it like a sail. **Learn basic pruning techniques, and put them into practice!**

Encourage Good Branch Angles - Narrow angles between branches signal a point of future weakness, so don't let them develop until they are too large to remove effectively; they're also usually ready to break by then. If the branch angle (fork) looks like the “V” sign made by your index and middle fingers, it is probably too narrow. If the fork approximates the angle between your thumb and index finger (when holding your hand upward with fingers closed and thumb spread outward) the angle is probably OK. Just a rule of thumb, you understand (no pun intended), but not a bad one I think.

Remove Rubbing Branches, Suckers, and Water Sprouts – this is part of proper pruning whether preventing future storm damage or not. Rubbing branches, suckers, and water sprouts are all easily broken if they are allowed to proliferate.

Don't Top Trees! - I've preached about this before and it is soooooooooo important in preventing storm damage. Topped trees are usually the first casualties when the winds, ice, etc. come calling.

Protect The Root System – it is the anchor and nutrition line to a healthy tree, so it is extremely important to protect this lifeline. Remember: Tree roots can spread 2-4 times the height of the tree and that the bulk of the feeder roots are in the upper 6-12 inches of soil. Avoid root damage by not compacting the soil, suffocating the roots with fill dirt, or by cutting roots excessively when digging or excavating.

This concludes the series on storm damage. Remember: a healthy, properly cared-for tree is less likely to be severely damaged in even the worst storm. So, get the right tree in the right place, prune properly, encourage good branch angles, protect the root system, and don't top your trees. Things should work out for the best, no matter what happens "out there."

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