Preventing storm damage in the landscape

You can’t control the weather, but you can help protect your landscape and home this hurricane season.

Drainage
Storms often leave areas flooded for extended periods of time, killing many landscape plants that aren’t suited for such conditions. If you have a low-lying area in your yard that tends to collect rain, plant things that can tolerate periodic flooding.

Lightning
Oftentimes, trees are the tallest things around, so they are likely targets for lightning strikes. A lightning strike will damage, and frequently kill even large trees. If you have a tall, valuable tree, or a tree within 10 feet of a structure, you may want to have a lightning protection system installed by an ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) Certified Arborist.

Are my trees dangerous?
A large amount of damage to homes and landscapes results from trees failing during storms. Many homeowners have the misperception that severe pruning right before hurricane season is the best way to prevent trees from being hazardous during a storm. Extreme pruning of trees can cause as much damage to trees and property as leaving them alone.

I am horrified to see that the archaic practice of topping trees is still used by some tree workers. Topping causes a multitude of hazards for people and trees. While proper pruning can prevent some storm damage, topping is never an acceptable pruning practice.

An ISA Arborist can train young trees for structural stability, which will greatly reduce the trees’ hazard potential when they are large. An arborist can also care for large trees.

Beware of guys with chain saws
If you are going to hire someone to work on a tree, ask the following questions:

- Are you an ISA Certified Arborist? (Ask for the certification number, and verify the certification at www.isa-arbor.org or call 217-355-9411.)
• **What experience do you have?** (Ask if you can look at other work that they’ve done; a tree won’t lie.)

• **Are you licensed?** (Ask for license number and call to verify that it’s for arboriculture work and current.)

• **Are you insured?** (Ask for a copy of the insurance certificate and *CALL THE COMPANY* to verify that it’s current. This is *critical*, not just a recommendation.)

**Protecting trees and palms from damage**
The best way to keep trees from coming down during storms is to avoid damaging them.

Roots are just as important to a tree as its canopy and trunk. Construction activities within about 20 feet of the trunk of a tree can cause the tree to blow over more than a decade later. Avoid planting, parking, installing pavement, changing the grade of the soil, or constructing anything under the canopy of a tree.

Cutting large branches off of a tree creates large wounds that will harbor decay and cracks that can lead to breakage in storms.

“Hurricane pruning” doesn’t make palms safer. Over-pruning palms can increase their susceptibility to damage in storms. Only cut off dead leaves.

**Planning and planting for storms**
These trees are some of the top wind-resistant trees and palms for Central Florida:
• Magnolia
• Cypress
• Tupelo
• Live Oak
• Cabbage Palm
• Butia Palm
• Podocarpus (Note: Podocarpus shrubs do not exist, but sometimes people prune podocarpus trees to various heights and shapes.)

If newly planted trees are top-heavy, they can be staked just until their roots grow in. Allow trees to develop strong trunks by keeping staking lines loose enough for trees to sway with the wind.

Give trees room to grow, above ground and below ground. Trees need enough space to anchor themselves in the ground. Trees in small spaces tend to blow over.

If you have the space, plant several trees in a group. Single trees blow over in storms easier than trees in groups.
Keep growing
For more information on protecting your landscape from storms, go to:
treesandhurricanes.ifas.ufl.edu.

Call 321-697-3015 to register for these free upcoming classes:

**Low Maintenance Landscapes**
July 11th
10am-noon
Extension Services, Osceola Heritage Park

**Homeowner Pruning Workshop**
July 18th
6:30 – 8:30pm
Extension Services, Osceola Heritage Park