

How to Prepare Trees for Storms

Living in Central Florida gives us the luxury of doing outdoor activities all year round. The weather seems to be great most of the time, but there is the harsh reality of hurricane season which begins June 1st of each year. In addition, I will not fail to mention the abundance of oak trees growing here in Central Florida; some over 100 years old. Some of these trees are unhealthy with branches hanging over the roof which is a safety concern. In my role as an Extension Agent, I have the opportunity to educate homeowners about their beloved trees. I frequently ask homeowners, when was the last time they inspected and maintained their trees. The answer is always, "Never." Every year trees are lost to storm related events; part of or the entire tree can be damaged. Trees can fall on our houses, cars, take people's lives, and it can be very costly to clean up after a storm.

The risk of trees getting damaged during a storm can be reduced by taking the following precautions: Inspect trees frequently for damage such as rot in the roots, stem, or branch and from beetle infestations. If you are not sure whether or not your tree is in good health, it is always a good idea to get the advice of a certified arborist. Pruning dead branches will drastically reduce the risk of damage to your property. Also, it is important to note that improper pruning such as removing more than 25% live canopy will encourage weak branches to grow and the tree will eventually become susceptible to storm damage. Furthermore, maintain young trees by removing low branches that will become large trunks; the aim is to have one central leader. Trees that have more than one central leader are undesirable and pose a greater risk of getting storm damage. Carefully examine trees that are leaning toward a structure; there is a higher chance that a leaning tree will not withstand vicious winds. Equally, trees with an unbalanced canopy should also be a concern to homeowners.

What to do before a storm - Contact a certified arborist, remove trees with cracks or splits; note some municipalities require that you get a permit before removing trees, so check your local ordinance. Equally important, examine trees for rot, remove rubbing and broken branches, and notify the power company of any part of a tree interfering with a power line.

What to do during a storm - Seek shelter in a secure place and avoid going outside as flying objects can cause bodily injury leading up to death.

What to do after a storm - Carefully inspect trees for damage; it is possible that trees could be damaged but did not fall. To remove fallen or damaged trees, it is always a good idea to get at least three estimates, and keep in mind that the cheapest is not always the best. Finally, if you are a "do it yourself" person, then be careful when using a chainsaw; always remember safety comes first.

For more information on trees and other related horticulture topics, contact Grantly Ricketts with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at 321-697-3000 or email gricketts@ufl.edu.