

# When a Storm Strikes



from the **TREE CITY USA®  
BULLETIN**

**N**ever is danger greater to a tree than during the inevitable trial by storm. The weight of ice or snow and the fury of wind test the strength of limbs, trunks, and roots. The homeowner, helpless at the moment, can only watch and hope that the tree survives. Survival or loss — the key can be the care you give your tree before and after a storm. Knowing ahead of time what to do when a storm strikes can prevent or minimize your financial loss.

## THE MORNING AFTER ...

Although your trees may look mortally damaged after a storm, trees have an amazing ability to recover from damage. With proper pruning and care, all but the most severely damaged have a good chance to regain their original health and beauty. Here are some things to do following a major storm in your community:

### 1. ASSESS THE DAMAGE

Don't be too quick to declare a tree beyond hope. If damage is relatively slight, or if most of the tree's basic structure is still intact despite the loss of many smaller limbs, the tree stands a good chance of making it. On the other hand, if the trunk is split or if most of the tree's leafy crown is down, the tree may be beyond help.

### 2. GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

If large limbs are hanging, if utility wires or structures are involved, or if high climbing is required, don't try to make repairs yourself. Secure the services of a certified arborist, a tree professional who can recommend needed repairs. They are generally listed in directories under "Tree Service." Above all, don't hire just anybody who shows up on your doorstep with a chain saw offering to remove or repair your trees. They are often interested in little more than removing your money.



### OTHER INFORMATION IN THIS ISSUE

- How to assess damage and make decisions
- How to avoid scam artists
- Caring for damaged trees
- How to prevent or reduce storm damage

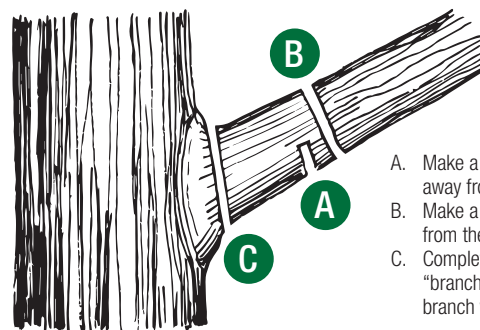
## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Follow these keys to preventing tree damage in future storms:

- ✓ Where early ice storms are a problem, avoid planting species that hold their leaves late into the fall.
- ✓ Keep trees healthy and vigorous by watering, fertilizing, and protecting the soil from compaction.
- ✓ Annually prune dead or weakened limbs, and occasionally thin excess branches from the crown. The goal is to produce a well-shaped tree with the center of gravity squarely over the trunk and a crown that lets wind pass through it rather than catching it like a sail.
- ✓ Avoid planting brittle species such as elms, willows, box elder, poplars, or silver maple in locations where breakage can endanger life or property.
- ✓ When planting, try to visualize the tree when mature, and avoid placing it too close to buildings or power lines.

## TREE FIRST AID AFTER A STORM

1. **Take safety precautions.** Be on the alert for downed power lines and "widow makers," dangerous hanging branches ready to fall. And, unless you really know how to use one, leave chain saw work to the professionals.
2. **Remove broken branches** that are still attached to the tree. Branches should be pruned at the point where they join larger ones, following the steps shown below.
3. **Don't top your trees.** Never cut the main branches back to stubs. Ugly, weakly attached limbs will often grow back higher than the



original branches and be more likely to break off in a future storm.

- A. Make a partial cut from beneath, several inches away from the trunk.
- B. Make a second cut from above, several inches out from the first cut, to allow the limb to fall safely.
- C. Complete the job with a final cut just outside the "branch collar," the raised area that surrounds the branch where it joins the trunk.



**Arbor Day Foundation®**  
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