

After the Storm

The wind finally stops howling. A sense of calm descends--until you go outside and find badly injured trees. After wind or snow storms, it's all too common to find branches dangling at ugly angles or entirely torn from trees. Some trees even split down the middle or blow over.

Whether you reach for the phone to call a professional or reach for your own pruning equipment, don't wait until the "right" time of year to act. When a tree is damaged, the right time to act is as soon as possible. Sawing off a dangling branch prevents further damage and may even save the life of the tree. A branch that has been torn off the tree leaves jagged edges. Jagged edges do not allow a tree to close the wound; such a wound is not only an eyesore, it is an invitation to rot, disease, and pests.

When pruning any branch, it is important to make the cut in the right place. Cuts should be made just outside the branch collar. If the cut is made too close to the collar, the tissue that can close the wound is damaged. If the cut is made too far from the collar, the awkward looking stubs that remain don't allow the tree to close the wound. Painting cuts and wounds is not recommended. Sharp pruning equipment is a requirement; using dull blades crushes tree tissue and tears bark.

Trees that split or blow over were probably diseased or at the end of their life span. Any tree that has split down the middle must be removed. Even if it survives the initial injury, its landscape value is lost. More urgently, it now represents a hazard. If houses, cars, or people are underneath such a tree, damage or injury can result. Dangling branches pose the same hazards.

Most people probably don't have the equipment, knowledge, or time to tackle large or complicated pruning or tree removal jobs. Certified arborists have training, equipment, and liability insurance. When selecting an arborist, find out if the arborist belongs to professional organizations, is certified by the International Society of Arboriculture, has proof of insurance, and can provide references.

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