

## RECENT STORMS: A GOOD REMINDER TO TAKE CARE OF TREES

Trees provide us with many benefits include cleaner air, savings in energy use, increased property values, and screening to reduce unpleasant views or noise. But the benefits do not come without some work, and seeing tree limbs break in a storm is a good reminder that proper tree maintenance is important.

“There is not much that can be done to prevent damage once the wind storm is underway – instead, it’s best to take a few steps early in the tree’s life that will hopefully pay dividends as the tree gets older,” says Matt Brewer, urban forestry specialist and ISA Certified Arborist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

When dealing with a storm damaged tree, it is important to make safety the priority. Never work around power lines or approach downed power lines. Consider calling a professional arborist, preferably an ISA Certified Arborist, especially in cases where leaving the ground, including climbing a ladder, or using unfamiliar equipment is required. If choosing to do the work yourself, make sure to use proper pruning techniques, which can be found on the DNR web page (<http://www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/shadetrees/care.html>).

The first step in preparing for a future storm involves selecting a tree species for planting that is appropriate for the site. If the requirements of the tree like space, soil, drainage, sun exposure, etc., match the characteristics of the site, the tree will be under less stress and have a better chance for long-term success. Also, different species have characteristics that may make them attractive, including growth rate, form, fall color, spring flower, shade density, and interesting bark.

“Often there is a tendency to pick a fast-growing tree to provide quick shade,” says Brewer. “While this is understandable, slower growing trees typically have better structural integrity than their faster counterparts.” Faster growing trees with poor branching habits, like silver maple or ash, are generally more heavily damaged during storm events. In the context of how the tree will perform in a future storm, good structure becomes very appealing and may lead a homeowner to select a slower-growing tree. “It’s at least something to consider,” Brewer said.

Also important is regular maintenance, and the early years are when the biggest return on investment will be realized. Proper pruning of trees up to 15 to 20 years old is cost effective, easier, and has a greater payoff than waiting until the tree is mature to do corrective pruning. “Training a young tree to have good structure has a big impact on its success as it matures,” said Brewer. Wounds also close more quickly, which minimizes the development of decay. In short, the effort spent working with a tree when it’s young will help prevent breakage caused by storms.

“Trees have a lot to offer, and with some work early on you can enjoy them throughout the seasons and the years,” said Brewer.

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