

Can These Trees Be Saved?

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A storm or other disaster can leave trees looking like there's no tomorrow. Major limbs may be broken or damaged, foliage may be shredded or stripped, or the bark may be torn or gouged. But what at first glance may look like mortal wounds are not necessarily fatal to a tree. Trees have an amazing ability to recover from storm damage.

First, Assess the Damage

Before writing off a damaged tree as a "goner," homeowners should evaluate their trees by asking the following questions:

- ◆ Other than the storm damage, is the tree basically healthy and vigorous? If the tree is basically healthy, is not creating a hazard, and did not suffer major structural damage, it will generally recover if given first aid immediately after the storm.
- ◆ Are major limbs broken? The larger a broken limb is, the harder it will be for the tree to recover from the damage. If most of the main branches are gone, the tree may have little chance of surviving.
- ◆ Has the leader (the main upward-trending branch on most trees) been lost? In species where a leader is important to upward growth or a desirable appearance, saving the tree may have to be a judgment call. The tree may live without its leader, but at best it would be a stunted or deformed version of the original.
- ◆ Is at least 50 percent of the tree's crown (branches and leaves) still intact? This is a good rule of thumb on tree survivability. A tree with less than half of its branches remaining may not be able to produce enough foliage to nourish the tree through another season.
- ◆ How big are the wounds where branches have been broken or bark has been damaged? The larger the wound is in relation to the size of the limb, the less likely it is to heal, leaving the tree vulnerable to diseases and insects. A 2- to 3-inch wound on a 12-inch diameter limb will seal over with new bark within a couple of years.
- ◆ Are there remaining branches that can form a new branch structure? The remaining limbs will grow more vigorously as the tree tries to replace its missing foliage. Look to see if there are branches that can eventually fill out the tree's appearance.
- ◆ Is the tree of a desirable species for its location? If the tree is in the wrong location (such as a potentially tall tree beneath a power line), or is an undesirable species for the property (messy fruit, etc.), it may be best to remove it if it has serious damage.