

# Storm-Related Tree Damage

Steps to take before and after severe storms that may damage trees.



## Prevention

While it is impossible to prevent all storm-related damage to trees, an ISA Certified Arborist® can help identify potential areas of concern, and help prepare your trees for inclement weather. Preventative tree care may include:

- Training your trees to improve their form.
- Identifying branch, trunk, and root defects that may weaken a tree, and recommending ways to manage them.
- Removing dead or defective branches.
- Correcting problems caused by improper care practices, such as topping, that have occurred in the past.
- Installing a lightning protection system to protect your high value trees.



## How Storms Damage Trees

Severe weather can have a lasting impact on your home and its surrounding landscape.

During a storm, the failure of part or all of a tree may cause significant damage to a property. For example:

- Strong winds can break tree branches and even uproot trees, particularly when combined with the softening of soils from heavy rain or snow storms.
- Heavy snow or ice loads on trees may cause tree branches to break under the added weight.
- Lightning strikes generate heat that vaporizes water within the tree, causing wood to rupture and bark to dislodge.

## What to Do After Severe Storm Damage?

### 1: Take Safety Precautions

Before getting ready to assess trees after a storm, it is important to consider the potential hazards:

- Broken limbs hanging overhead or uprooted trees fallen and resting in other trees, on roofs or other built structures may continue to move during and after the storm has passed.
- Trees and limbs under tension may react unexpectedly when cut or moved.
- Damaged trees may be in contact directly or indirectly with electrical wires which have the potential to cause injury or death from electrocution. Removing trees or branches in close proximity to electrical lines or structures requires knowledge and experience.

When possible, stay clear of the area around damaged trees and call the local emergency services, utility company, or an arborist.

### 2: Assess the Damage

Following damage from a storm, an arborist can assess your tree(s) and advise on the:

- Extent of damages and whether or not the tree(s) can be saved or require removal.
- Present or potential hazards associated with the damaged tree(s).

After severe storms assessments of tree damage should also take into account trees seemingly not damaged by the storm, particularly any larger trees near to locations of people or property. An ISA Certified Arborist® should check such trees for cracks in trunks or limbs, hanging branches, or soil heaving.

### 3: Resist the Urge to Do It Yourself

Homeowners may be tempted to begin tree debris cleanup prior to consulting an ISA Certified Arborist; however, there are multiple potential hazards associated with tree damage repair or removal work, including:

- Having to work at height.
- Retrieving fallen tree parts on buildings or in contact with utility services.
- Operating tree-cutting machinery and removal equipment.

These and other such tree work operations—especially debris cleanup—are inherently dangerous and should be carried out by a professional arborist.

### 4: Hire an Arborist

Professional arborists have the experience and equipment needed to safely and efficiently remove or prune severely damaged trees and haul away unwanted debris.

ISA Certified Arborists are individuals who have demonstrated a high level of knowledge and experience in tree care. They can help assess the extent of the damage caused by a storm and help you decide what action is appropriate.



## What Is a Certified Arborist?

ISA Certified Arborists are individuals who have proven a level of knowledge in the art and science of tree care through experience and by passing a comprehensive examination developed by some of the nation's leading experts on tree care. ISA Certified Arborists must also continue their education to maintain their certification. Therefore, they are more likely to be up to date on the latest techniques in arboriculture.

## Finding an Arborist

Visit [TreesAreGood.org](https://TreesAreGood.org) for free tools:

- The “Find an Arborist” tool can help you locate an arborist in your area.
- The “Verify a Credential” tool enables you to confirm whether an arborist has an ISA credential.

## Be an Informed Consumer

One of the best methods to use in choosing an arborist is to educate yourself about some of the basic principles of tree care. Visit [TreesAreGood.org](https://TreesAreGood.org) to read and download all brochures in this series.



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