

# Hurricane Preparations Should Include the Landscape

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

**Do not wait for a major storm to form in or enter the Gulf before inspecting large shade trees on your property to ensure that they are structurally sound. Structurally unsound trees are likely to blow over or snap during hurricanes or other high-wind conditions.**



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Hurricane season officially started on June 1. Meteorologists and emergency operation center managers have three words of advice: prepare, prepare, prepare.

If some of your attention has not been focused on the Gulf of Mexico during hurricane season, you must be new to the area. While such an assessment sounds

rather judgmental, I am a transplant from Virginia and it took me a few days after moving here to learn to be very vigilant about what is happening in the Gulf of Mexico during hurricane season and to make an emergency operation plan.

You should have a family disaster plan for what you would do in case a hurri-

cane strikes. We all know that there are lots of things we need to do well in advance of a hurricane heading in our direction, from having adequate food and water on hand to getting important papers together for evacuation.

Our landscapes also require some attention and thought when it comes to



preparing for and dealing with the aftermath of the high winds and heavy rains that hurricanes bring.

Do not wait for a major storm to form in or enter the Gulf before you carefully check large shade trees on your property to make sure they are structurally sound. Trees should be examined periodically for health and potential hazards.

In particular, look for any large dead branches in the trees. Large dead branches should be removed, especially if they pose a threat to the house.

Also, look for branches that extend over the roof. The high winds of hurricanes can cause trees to twist and branches to flail about considerably. These branches can cause extensive damage to the roof and should generally be removed.

Look for abnormal or unusual growths on tree trunks or limbs. If you see fungal growths that look like mushrooms (known as conks) on a tree trunk then the trunk likely has heart rot or decay. The presence of this fungus is particularly serious if several conks are present. To determine if the tree is unsafe, you need to know how extensive the decay is. Contact a certified arborist immediately if you see conks growing on the trunk of a tree.

Cavities and hollows in trunks and branches are typically the result of long-term decay that followed some type of injury. The injury often occurred many years ago. If a tree has a cavity or hollow, you should have the tree inspected by a

certified arborist. Hollow trees are not always at risk of falling down so each situation must be carefully assessed. A tree cavity is similar to a cavity in your tooth. Without proper treatment, the situation will only get worse.

Look at the overall condition of the trees in your landscape. A tree that is sickly or low in vigor and shows significant signs of rotten or decayed areas in the trunk or termite damage should be cut down if it poses a threat to buildings.

If it's a large tree, you should also consider how it might affect neighboring properties. It is best to have this kind of work done by professional, licensed arborists.

Well before a hurricane threatens, if you are the organized sort, make a list of things outside that need to be brought inside and where to put them, and make a list of things that need to be tied down.

Buy the necessary equipment, including anchors. Estimate how long it will take to secure items. You can make these lists part of your family's emergency plan.

Should a hurricane head our way, it's important to secure loose objects in your landscape. Look around your grounds for container plants, hanging baskets, tools, lawn furniture (including porch swings), toys, bicycles, bird feeders, wind chimes, barbecue grills, playhouses and doghouses.

These items can become destructive missiles during high winds and should be anchored securely in place or moved indoors, inside garages or well-anchored sheds.

Don't wait for a tree to let you know it is sick or dangerous! Be proactive. Look over your trees. If you see something suspicious, call a certified arborist. A healthy tree is a safer tree!

Now is the time to take care of these tree issues; do not delay.

At a Glance

**WHAT:** Soil Health . . . how to evaluate it and how to improve it

**WHAT:** Galveston County Master Gardener Jim Gilliam will present a program that describes how to evaluate the "health" of your garden soil. With only a spade and a wire flag, he will show how to conduct 18 tests that will allow you to determine your soil's quality. He will offer strategies for resolving deficiencies. Building great soil is the most important step to take for successful gardening.

**WHEN:** 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, June 16

**Where:** Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbine Park (4102-B Main Street) in La Marque. Pre-registration required by e-mail (galvcountymgs@gmail.com) or phone (281-309-5065).

