

Hurricane Preparations Should Include the Landscape

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson

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 in good shape and structurally sound. Without proper treatment, the situation will only get worse.

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

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.

You have a family disaster plan for what you would do in case a hurricane strikes. You checked your disaster supply kit and ob-

tained and/or replaced any items you need.

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.



May 22, 2019



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News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.





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 in good shape and structurally sound. Trees should be examined periodically for health and potential hazards.

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

Also, look for branches that hang over the house near the roof. The high winds of hurricanes can cause trees to bend somewhat and branches to flail around considerably. These branches can cause extensive damage to the roof and should generally be removed.

Look for abnormal or unusual growth 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. Call a certified arborist immediately if you see conks growing on or around the trunk of a tree.

Cavities and hollows in trunks and branches are typically the result of decay that followed injury. The injury often occurred many years ago. If a tree has a cavity or hollow, have it inspected by an arborist. Hollow trees are not always at risk

of falling 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.

Trees that are one-sided or leaning should be pruned to balance out the canopy. After the prolonged rain associated with many hurricanes, the soil may be so soft that trees can topple over if the weight is not properly distributed.

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. Arborists are trained individuals who make a career of caring for the urban forest.

It's a good idea to contact more than one company and get estimates before you have the work done. And do make it a point to be present when the work crew is there, so you can make sure what is done is what you wanted.

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 things. 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 stored indoors, in garages or sheds, or anchored securely in place.

If you have removed the stakes from young trees planted within the past one to three years, consider re-staking them just before a hurricane to prevent them from blowing over. Make sure the stakes are driven deeply and securely into the ground.

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 safe tree!

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

