

# Check trees after winter storms

SISTERS – Right after a winter storm has passed is a good time for property owners in eastern Oregon to check if their trees were damaged. Knowing how badly ice, snow or wind has injured a tree can indicate what immediate or long-term steps might be needed.

Removing trees that pose an immediate risk to people or property should be the first order of business, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry’s Katie Lompa. She is ODF’s Community Assistance Forester for eastern and southern Oregon.

“Large trees that have fallen over and are blocking streets, sidewalks or driveways after a storm need attention right away,” said Lompa. “Just as important is removing trees whose roots are lifting out of the ground. Be alert for large hanging branches and stay away from power lines a tree may have brought down.”

Barring those extreme examples, Lompa said trees have an amazing ability to recover from storm damage. “It’s usually best to resist the urge to hastily cut down or heavily prune a tree that a storm has damaged. Give the tree time to recover. You may be surprised!” she said.

Lompa recommends

answering the following questions soon after a storm has passed, and acting upon the recommended treatment:

- Are limbs broken, cracked or split? Prune back the limb to where it meets a larger branch, or in some cases back to the tree’s trunk. If more than 50% of a tree’s large limbs are damaged, the tree has less of a chance of surviving. Consider removal.
- If a tree is leaning or uprooted, what size is it? If it is a small, younger tree, you may be able to right it and stake it. Larger, older trees are more difficult to save. They may never regrow roots that would be able to hold the tree in place.
- Are there large wounds where branches have broken or bark has been damaged? The larger the wound, the more vulnerable the tree is to diseases and pests. With a sharp blade, smooth ragged edges of wounds where bark has been torn away, being careful not to expose any more of the greenish inner bark (cambium). Monitor the wound for decay and attack by pests but do not try to paint or cover over wounds. It’s usually ineffective and can make the situation worse.
- Is the top of the main trunk lost? On a smaller tree,

you may be able to train an adjacent branch to become the new leader. If it is a larger tree, you may need to consider removal. If the tree is not in a location where its falling would pose a risk to people or property, consider leaving 20 or 30 feet of the trunk standing as a tree where wildlife can perch or make nests.

- Is the trunk cracked or split? Cracks are dangerous and can be fatal to the tree, to passersby and to nearby structures. Removal is probably the only option.
- Is the tree worth saving? If a tree has been seriously damaged and meets any of the conditions below then it may be best to remove it and start over. Consider this option if the damaged tree:

- Is located where it does not have enough room to grow.
  - Has had its natural shape ruined by improper pruning, such as topping.
  - Is an invasive species, such as English hawthorn or tree of heaven.
- “Tree of heaven is not only invasive in Oregon but has very brittle wood. It can quickly grow into a large tree whose branches snap off in storms, damaging property,” warned Lompa. “That makes it a good candidate for removal.”



PHOTO BY CHRIS PATRICK

A November 2011 wind storm did much damage in Sisters Country.

If you have concerns about your tree, consider hiring an arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). An ISA-certified arborist can discuss options with you and may be able to save a lightly damaged tree through good pruning techniques. Remedial pruning almost always costs less than removal, said Lompa. Before removing, pruning, or replanting it’s also a good idea to check with your city’s forestry officials or your homeowners’ association to see if any permits or special rules apply.

Lompa advised that in eastern Oregon it may be best to replant in early spring after the last hard freeze. Low winter temperatures in this part of the state can make it hard to dig a planting hole and can damage or kill newly planted trees. When a replacement tree is planted, stakes are usually not needed to keep it in place unless it is in a windy area or a place where people may walk on the root zone, said Lompa. “Natural movement of the branches and trunk due to wind actually helps the tree grow stronger.”

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