



Great Places

Green Spaces

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Key topics: Preparing for and Recovering from Summer Storms

By William Ozment

Stormy Skies and Tree Ties: Weather the Weather Together!

Summer in South Dakota means sunshine, community events, and unfortunately, the occasional severe storm. As we enjoy the longer days under the canopy of our community trees, it's also the perfect time to check on their health, plan for resilience, and celebrate the many ways our trees support pollinators and people alike.

In this issue, we are going to cover a lot of topics regarding tree care and maintenance. If you are looking to address a storm damaged tree or just a tree that is somewhere on your property and are uncertain of what to do, please contact a local certified arborist or tree care company.

After the storm: Caring for Damaged Trees

South Dakota's summer storms can bring hail, high winds, and heavy rain – all of which can damage even the strongest trees. When storms hit, safety comes first. Look for broken limbs, hanging branches, or leaning trees and keep away from hazards.

Assessing the Damage:

Broken branches can be dangerous, remove them quickly to help prevent further injury to the tree or your property.

Acting promptly also reduces the risk of pests, diseases, or decay entering through the wound.

Pruning damaged areas of the tree by removing broken or cracked branches prevents further damage and helps the tree heal properly if the pruning is done correctly. For trees that can be saved, cabling or bracing to support the structure while it heals may be possible. If there is too much damage to the tree or structural integrity is overly compromised, removal should be considered.

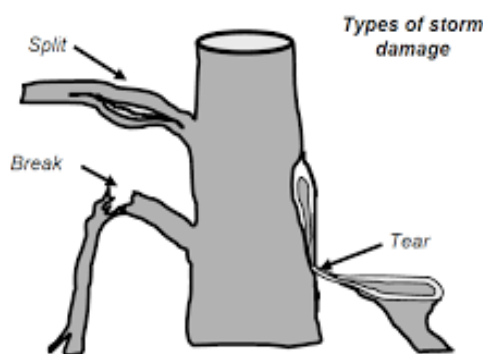


Figure 1

Splits and cracks: trees can sustain cracks in the trunk or branches, comprising structural integrity. Call a local certified arborist to inspect the potential damage.

Safety: Storm damaged trees are unpredictable, so clearing debris and cutting damaged limbs can be more dangerous than it initially appears. Large branches under tension or leaning trees may shift unexpectedly, posing serious safety risks. Call a local certified arborist to have your storm damaged trees more safely assessed, maintained, or removed.

"Trees are amazingly resilient and many recover with proper care and time"
—John Rosenow, founder of the Arbor Day Foundation



Caring for Damaged Trees

Tree Recovery and Maintenance

Given the time frame required to grow a large tree, it is often worthwhile to attempt saving a storm-damaged tree. With appropriate pruning, patience, and ongoing care, trees can recover remarkably well. If uncertain, it's best to allow the tree some time. The main priority should be to prevent hazards, as any tree can shed limbs or topple. A healthy, well-pruned tree is less risky, whereas a poorly pruned tree is more dangerous.

Watering trees: if a tree sustains damage in a storm, it will likely experience heightened stress. Providing adequate water, especially during dry periods, will aid in their recovery and reduce stress.

Regular pruning: Preventative maintenance can minimize storm damage. Pruning dead or weakened branches can strengthen trees against high winds and heavy snow before storms happen.

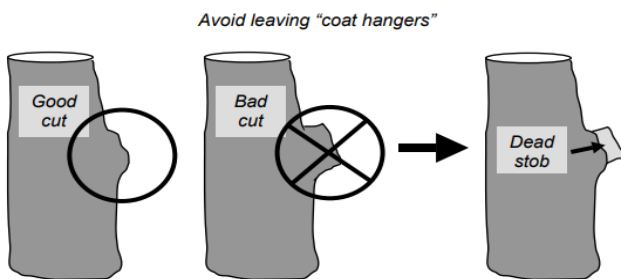


Figure 2

Tree health checkups: Regular visual health assessments can identify early signs of disease, decay, or structural weakness before they become serious problems. **Right tree right place:** If trees are lost, planting new ones in more protected areas or away from structures can help to prevent storm-related hazards.

“Proper pruning can significantly enhance a tree’s ability to withstand storms”
-ISA Certified Arborist

Besides pruning, providing extra water during hot, dry summers (a slow trickle for a few hours at night every other week) can help recovery. Pruning a large tree is hazardous, using a chainsaw on a damaged tree should be left to trained arborists or tree care companies. Arborists can also employ techniques like cabling, deep fertilization, and integrated pest management to save trees and reduce risk.

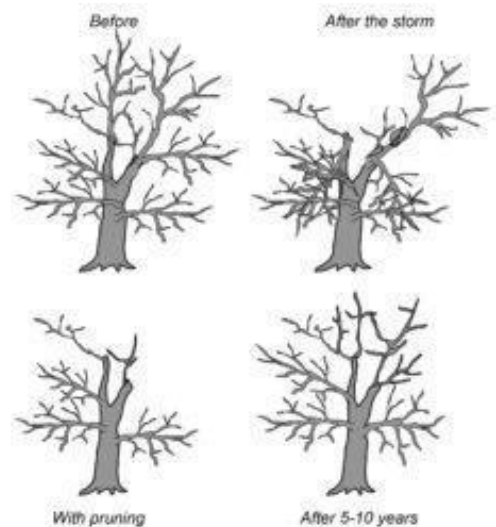


Figure 3

When to Hire a Tree Care Professional:

- If you need a ladder for pruning.
- If there are downed and/or potentially has energized power lines near the tree.
- If there is notable storm damage.
- If you are unsure how to prune the tree.
- If the tree is located near a structure or valuable items.
- If the tree has visible decay present.
- If the work makes you feel uncomfortable.
- And many more....



Tree Cleanup and Support

Key Tips for Tree Cleanup

Avoid Topping Trees: Avoid cutting the dominant leader, this can lead to the growth of unattractive, weak limbs that are more likely to break in future storms.

Smooth Torn Bark: Trim the ragged edges of torn bark to help the wound heal faster and improve the compartmentalization of decay.

Three-Step Pruning Process:

- Make a partial cut from underneath the branch, a few inches away from the trunk.
- Make a second cut from above, a few inches out from the first cut, to let the limb fall safely.
- Finish with a final cut just outside the branch collar, the raised areas where the branch meets the trunk.

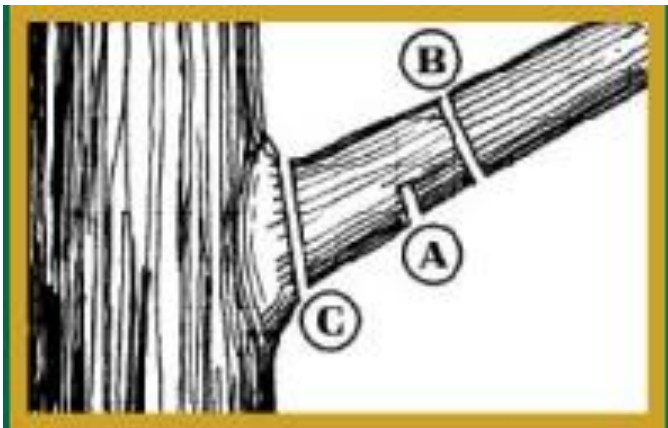


Figure 4

Proper pruning is essential to ensure no further damage is done to the tree allowing it to heal completely and efficiently. Improper pruning can cause more damage than benefit.

Straightening and Supporting Leaning Trees

Storms can sometimes cause trees to lean. While some trees may naturally return to their upright position, many will need assistance. Natural recovery can start within days and continue throughout the growing season, but trees with stems thicker than 3 inches usually won't straighten on their own. Over time, bent wood fibers harden and retain their curved form, and larger stems are more difficult to straighten. When attaching support lines, it is crucial to cushion the part that wraps around the tree with materials like rubber hose, inner-tube, or foam to distribute pressure around the bark. Do not use thin lines like wire or rope as it can cause damage to the tree or girdle it if it is forgotten about. Guide lines should be left in place for one year and then removed to prevent the tree from becoming dependent on the support instead of developing new woody fibers.

For minor uprooting of smaller trees (under 25 feet), straightening and guying are options if done immediately after damage. Try to ensure roots remain covered and moist when staking an uprooted tree. Place stakes evenly around the tree and attach securely without pulling on the tree.

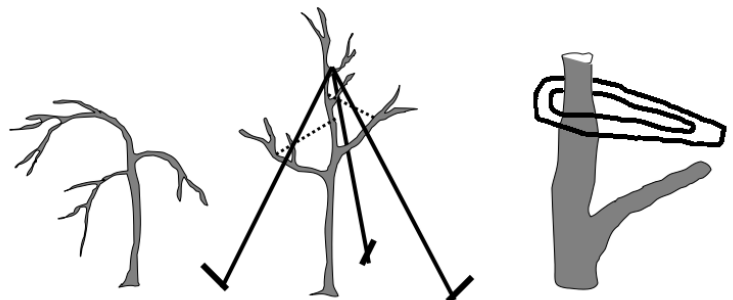


Figure 5

"Proper tree care is an investment that can lead to substantial returns"
-National Arbor Day Foundation



Conifer Care

Conifers

Evergreen trees require different pruning techniques compared to broadleaf trees. Conifers typically have a single main stem with evenly spaced lateral branches. Unlike most hardwoods, lateral branches on conifers do not resprout well, though this can vary by species. Spruces and firs may produce some weak new lateral branches, while pines rarely do. Conifers can grow new treetops if enough lateral branches remain to support growth. However, a conifer that loses the majority of its canopy will likely eventually die.

If a conifer loses its top in a windstorm, the main stem should be trimmed back to within an inch or two of healthy lateral branches. The final cut should be made at a slight angle (about 10 degrees) to allow water runoff. Typically, several new treetops will form from the lateral branches near the top. If left unchecked, the tree may develop multiple tops, making it more prone to wind damage. If the goal is to let the tree grow tall again, it's best to select the strongest new treetop closest to the original stem. This method is recommended for pines.

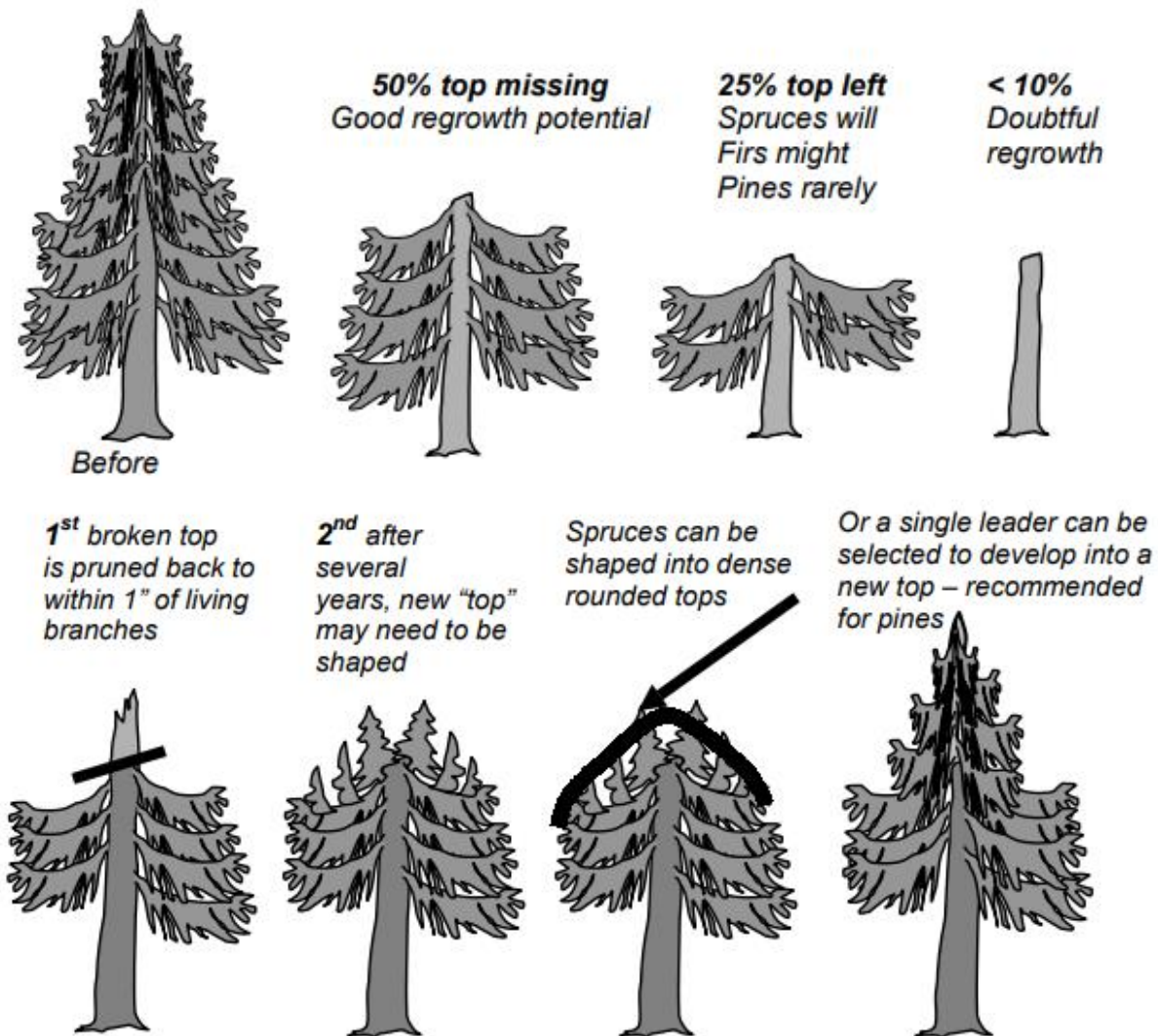


Figure 6



Sources and Credits

Sources

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Photo Credits

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2. 4 - Photo retrieved from National Arbor Day Foundation. Retrieved from National Arbor Day Foundation website.

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Contact Us:

John Hartland
Staff Forester
South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Resource Conservation & Forestry Division
1501 S Highline Ave
Sioux Falls, SD 57106
Direct: 605.362.2830 | Cell: 605.933.9650