



CAL FIRE's Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program Tips for Tree Survival Pre and Post Storm

Preparing for Future Storms

Trees provide many benefits including clean air, shade, and happiness, as well as carbon sequestration, but major storms and high winds can inflict a great deal of damage to the tree canopy in a short period of time. However, in every storm, many trees survive with minimal damage. With proper care, much of the worst damage to trees and property can be prevented.

Here are five suggestions for pruning and care prior to a storm:



- **Encourage good branch angles.** For most deciduous trees, narrow angles between two branches signal a point of future weakness. A good rule to follow for many deciduous trees is to keep the angles at 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock.
- **Encourage strong branch/trunk size relationship.** Ideally, lateral branches should be no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ the diameter of the trunk.

- **Maintain a stable center of gravity.** The center of gravity for a tree should be over the trunk. Remove branches on the leaning side and encourage branch growth on the opposite side.

- **Remove temporary branches.** This includes rubbing branches, suckers and water sprouts which are the very small sprouts from a tree's trunk or larger limbs.





- **Don't cut branches back to stubs.** Long, natural limbs on a tree are strong and can withstand storm-like conditions. If a branch needs to be removed, cut it back to the main branch or to the tree's trunk.

In the Wake of a Storm

Assessing damage and providing needed care to community trees as well as tree on your property is central to effective long-term disaster recovery and tree health.

Here are some tips for the days immediately after a storm:

- **Don't try to do it all yourself.** If large limbs are broken or hanging, or if high climbing or overhead chainsaw work is needed, it's a job for a professional arborist. Arborists are especially important when a tree is leaning against wires, structures, or other trees, if utility lines or structures are endangered or if a chainsaw is required. If you find a tree in this situation, do not touch it. Contact an arborist or your local services.



- **Assess the tree's likelihood of survival.** A tree with less than half of its branches remaining may not be able to produce enough foliage to remain nourished in the coming seasons.
- **Remove any broken branches still attached to the tree.** Removing the jagged remains of smaller sized broken limbs is one common repair that property owners can make after a storm. If done properly, it will minimize the risk of decay agents, disease, and pests entering the wound.



- **Resist the urge to over prune.** Don't worry if the tree's appearance isn't perfect. With branches gone, your trees may look unbalanced or naked. You'll be surprised at how fast they will heal, grow new foliage, and return to their natural beauty.
- **Don't top your trees.** Often tree owners are urged to cut back all the branches, on the mistaken assumption that reducing the length of branches will help avoid breakage in future storms. While storm damage may not always allow for ideal pruning cuts, professional arborists say that "topping," cutting main branches back to stubs, is one of the worst things you can do for your trees.
- **Contact a certified arborist.** If you are unsure or would like help caring for your tree after a storm, contact an arborist for an assessment.

The purpose of CAL FIRE's Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program (UCF) is to help create a sustainable urban forest and increase the long-term benefits trees provide, improve the public's understanding and appreciation of urban trees, and advance urban forest management and tree care. In 2021-22, the UCF awarded \$29.9 million in grant funding for the planting of over 37,000 urban trees in 17 California counties.

Tree care information courtesy of [Arbor Day Foundation](#)

