



GWINNETT COUNTY

Managing Storm Damaged Trees

*Timothy Daly, County Extension Agent,
UGA Extension Gwinnett*

Frequently severe thunder storms move through our area blowing over trees that bring down power lines, damage vehicles, close roads and can even cause fatalities. If the storms occur when excessive amounts of rainfall have saturated the soil, the trees will be of increased risks of being damaged by the high winds. The high-stress levels they have been under in recent years as a result of the prolonged drought, construction activities, and pest infestations have increased the chances of trees suffering damage. What should you do if you have trees damaged and blown down as a result of the storms?

First and foremost, take the necessary safety precautions. Storm damaged trees can present dangers to homeowners. The trees could be in contact with electrical wires. Anyone touching the tree could be electrocuted. Contact your local power provider so they can assess the situation. Trees that are down or partially blown over can quickly shift position due to the uneven weight distribution. Avoid climbing on the tree or pulling on any limbs.

You may be tempted to begin removing the damaged tree yourself. However, doing so can lead to serious injury or death. If large sections of the tree are broken or hanging, or if the work will require the use of a ladder or chainsaw overhead, then a certified arborist should be consulted. "It's tempting to get out and start cleaning up the mess yourself," said Neil Norton, Executive Director of the Georgia Arborist Association. "But heavy, broken tree limbs can be very dangerous, and their removal is best left to the professionals," Neil said overhead work could be hazardous, especially if a chain saw is needed to complete the job. A homeowner should clear only minor tree debris.

A certified arborist is someone who has received proper training through the International Society of Arboriculture (<http://isa-arbor.com>) and has been tested for knowledge of the technical information on tree care, repair and removal. These professionals have the resources for the safe removal of damaged trees. If the trees are near electrical lines or structures, specialized expertise and equipment are necessary to remove them. Additionally, arborists can provide recommendations for preventative maintenance to maximize the health of the existing trees on your property, such as pruning, fertilization and pest control.



Trees can be toppled by high winds in thunderstorms and can cause property damage as well as harm to humans. Homeowners should not try to remove downed trees. Only professional tree care companies have the equipment and expertise to remove the trees safely. (Picture by Timothy Daly, UGA Extension Gwinnett).

How should you go about searching for a tree removal service? Make sure the person doing the assessment of the trees is a certified arborist. Ask for proof of insurance, including the name and contact information of the insurance company. Check to make sure the company has the necessary licenses and permits to perform the work. Ask for references and contact them. Consider visiting sites where the company has performed work in the past. Get multiple estimates and do not always accept the lowest bid.

You should examine the credentials and the written specifications of the estimates to determine the best combination of price, work to be done and professionalism. Most reputable arborists present their clients with a detailed contract. It explains when the work will begin and end as well as who will be responsible for the cleanup. It should specify the total costs. Ask if there are any hidden fees, such as stump grinding, which often is an additional charge. For more information on arborists and tree care companies, visit the website of the Georgia Arborist Association at www.georgiaarborist.org.

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating. Cooperative Extension, the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, gender or disability.

The University of Georgia is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.